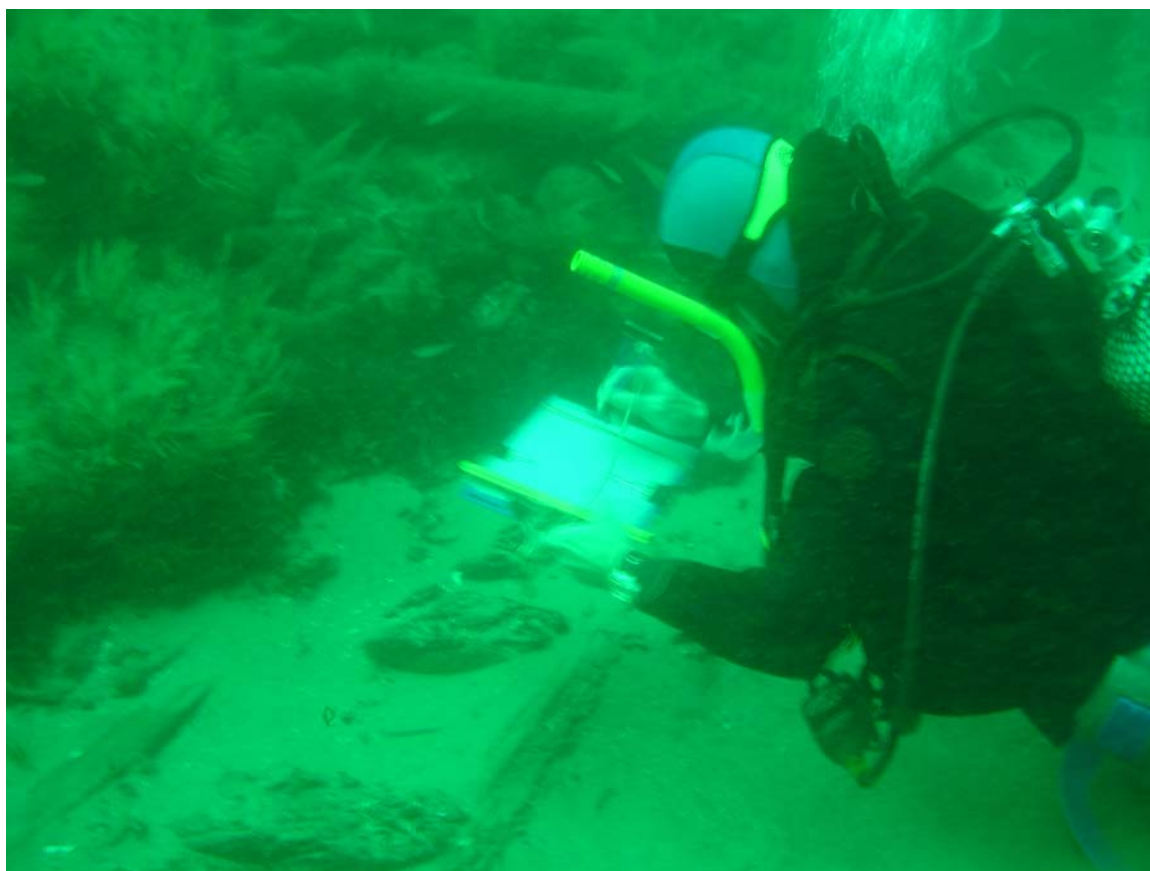


Economic Relations on a Nineteenth Century Irish Maritime Landscape: Achill Island Maritime Archaeology Project 2006 Final Report



by

Chuck Meide and Sam Turner

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Economic Relations on a Nineteenth Century Irish Maritime Landscape: Achill Island Maritime Archaeology Project 2006 Final Report

Introduction

Achill is Ireland's largest island, and Europe's most westerly inhabited island, located off the remote coast of County Mayo between Clew and Blacksod Bays (Figure 1). It is separated from Corraun Peninsula on the mainland by Achill Sound, a narrow tidal inlet known for its dangerously swift currents. Long renowned for its friendly people, dynamic landscape, and breathtaking scenery, the island sees a regular influx of tourists each summer while still retaining a feeling of isolation. Archaeological evidence indicates that Achill has been continuously inhabited since at least the Neolithic, and the island's rugged landscape features a wide range of archaeological sites, including megalithic tombs, cashels, promontory forts, ogham stones, the ruins of several post-Medieval booleying and permanent villages, 19th century manor houses, a 15th century tower house associated with the Pirate Queen Grace O'Malley, and a single crannog. A longstanding excavation programme and annual archaeological field school sponsored by the Achill Folklife Centre has brought much attention to the island's archaeology, but until recently Achill's maritime archaeological landscape has been largely ignored.

That changed in 2004 when the first season of the Achill Island Maritime Archaeology Project was launched. This endeavour was sponsored by the College of William and Mary, directed by PhD student Chuck Meide as the topic for his dissertation research, and received logistical support from the Achill Folklife Centre in Dooagh. The objectives of the project were to initiate a broad-based ethnographic, historical, and archaeological survey of Achill's maritime landscape, and to document archaeological sites and features related to Achill's rich maritime history. A second three-month field season was implemented the following year (Meide 2006a). It became apparent that there was a preponderance of extant sites dating mainly to the 19th century upon the coastline, foreshore, and underwater. In between the two field sessions, a week was spent in the Public Record Offices in London, gathering documentary records related to regional shipping, shipwrecks, British maritime policies, and local maritime activities. An extremely rich archival record documenting these issues exists for the 19th century, and this research avenue became more and more promising as this dynamic and conflicted period of Irish history became more and more interesting to the principal investigator. While the project retains a broad scope, the research focus has narrowed to an investigation of 19th century economic relations between imperial Britain and Achill Islanders. Because of its isolation, geography, unique history, and wide range of extant archaeological resources, Achill is uniquely suited to explore these issues. In addition, the geographical scope has broadened to include investigations throughout Clew Bay, as the many maritime and economic connections between Achill, the nearby islands, and the commercial centres of Newport and Westport became apparent.

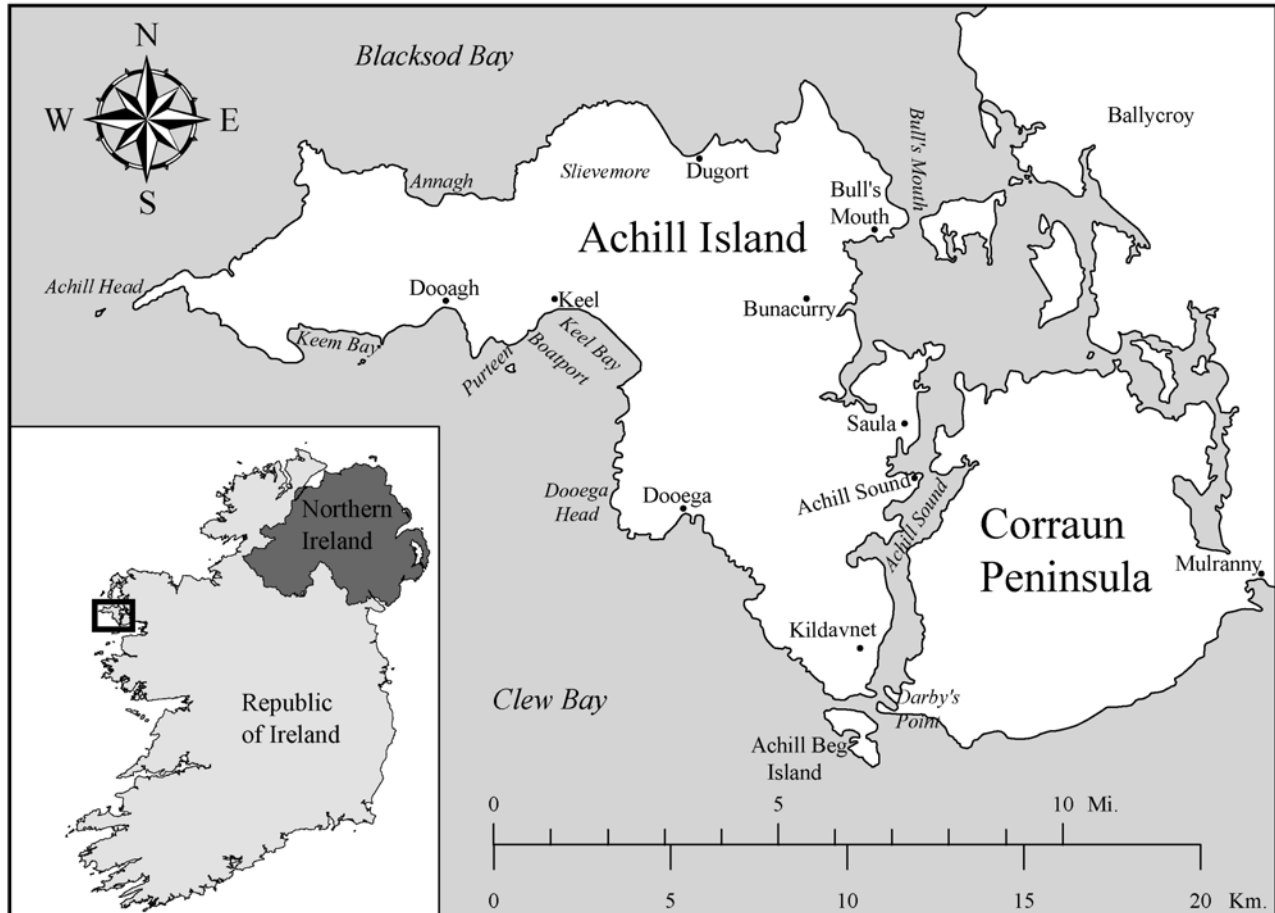


Figure 1. Map of Achill Island and the immediate surrounding area in County Mayo on the west coast of Ireland. Drawing by Katie Sikes and Chuck Meide.

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 have been discussed in Meide 2006a and in this report.

The third and final major season of fieldwork ran from the start of June through the end of July 2006. This was a very successful field season, for a number of reasons. In 2006, the project was sponsored not only by the College of William and Mary but also by the Institute of Maritime History (IMH) and the Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program (LAMP), two international maritime archaeological research institutes based in the U.S.A. Significantly more funding was provided than in previous years, by the College of William and Mary and LAMP, and also by the Heritage Council through its Archaeology Grant Scheme. The project also had more archaeologists, as many as four crew members at once, than in either of the two previous seasons. These resources

yielded a significant return in data in what has always proven a challenging working environment in terms of remoteness, expense, and adverse weather conditions. Six days of diving were successfully completed, for a total of 34 dives comprising 24 hours, 49 minutes of bottom time. This was more underwater work than in the two previous years combined.

This report provides a detailed summary of the project activities during the 2006 field season. It is intended to fulfil the Heritage Council grant requirements, as well as the five Dive/Survey Licences issued to the project in order to dive on any shipwreck over 100 years of age in Irish waters, as required by Section 3 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1987.

Following this introduction is an essay outlining the theoretical and historical context from which our research questions are framed. The remainder of the report is divided up into three major sections. Part I focuses on imperial and commercial architecture extant upon Achill's maritime landscape. This includes studies of coastguard station and boathouse ruins, as well as those of structures related to Achill's early commercial fishing industry. Part II deals with vernacular watercraft and associated watercraft-related sites, including curragh pens and landing places. Part III is dedicated to various shipwrecks and shipwreck artefacts investigated during the 2006 season.

Table 1 summarizes project activities carried out on each shipwreck or other maritime site during the 2006 field season. Where applicable, it lists the Dive/Survey Licence number and indicates what if any activities warrant a summary in this report. One shipwreck, the Westport Quay Wreck, was discovered unexpectedly, and its preliminary investigation was carried out without first applying for a permit after receiving verbal permission from Connie Kelleher of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government's Underwater Archaeology Unit.

Table 1. Summary of activity undertaken on various maritime sites around Achill Island during the 2006 season

Licence No.	Wreck name	Date	Location	Activity on Site	Summary in this report
06DO49	<i>Victory</i>	1895	Achill Sound at Belfarsad (Corraun)	An informal walking survey was made along the foreshore in this area—no historic cultural material observed	None
06DO50	<i>Neptune</i>	1860	Keel Bay, under Minaun Cliffs	In 2005, under licence 05DO52, a dive was conducted in the area but no cultural material was observed. Two anchors raised from the site in 1980 by local waterman were located. One was recorded during the 2005 season, and the second was recorded in 2006.	Yes
06DO51	<i>Sceptre of Limerick</i>	1841	Off west coast of Achill	No attempt made to find this site. An anchor from this wreck which was raised in the 1960s was recorded during the 2006 season.	Yes
06DO52	<i>Jenny</i>	1894	Achill Beg Island	This site was identified by archaeologists in 2004, and two raised anchors were recorded. A preliminary survey of the scattered remains of this shipwreck was carried out during the 2006 season.	Yes
06DO53	Unknown wreck near Clare Island; “Train Shipwreck”	19 th or 20 th century	North of Clare Island	A preliminary survey of the exposed remains of this shipwreck was carried out during the 2006 season.	Yes
No licence	Westport Quay Wreck	19 th or 20 th century	Off Westport Quay exposed on the foreshore	This abandoned vessel, believed to be a lighter, was subjected to a 2-day preliminary survey during the 2006 season.	Yes

Table 1. Summary of activity undertaken on maritime sites around Achill Island, 2006 season (continued)

Licence No.	Site name	Date	Location	Activity on site	Summary in this report
N/A	<i>Successful</i> shipwreck (fishing trawler)	1950s, but poss. 19 th century construction date	On foreshore in offshoot of Achill Sound across from Bleannahooey Strand	In 2005 the exposed hull remains were recorded in detail. In 2006, the site was visited, and some time was spent recording the rudder and steering gear.	Yes
N/A	Dooagh curragh pens	ca.100 yr ago to present	Dooagh pier, Achill	Several days were spent recording 20 curragh pens and the surrounding landscape (pier, etc).	Yes
N/A	Purteen curragh pens	Poss. 19 th century to present	Purteen Harbour	One day was spent recording 4 or 5 curragh pens.	Yes
N/A	Boatport curragh pens	mid-19 th century	Boatport (Portnaluinge)	One day was spent recording 9 curragh pens.	Yes
N/A	Boatport Coastguard Boathouse	mid-late 19 th century	Boatport (Portnaluinge)	One days was spent recording the extant architectural remains.	Yes
N/A	Cloghmore Coastguard Boathouse	mid-late 19 th century	Cloghmore Pier, Achill	One day was spent recording the extant architectural remains.	Yes
N/A	Salmon Fishery Ice House	ca. 1856-1913	Corraun peninsula	One day was spent recording the extant architectural remains.	Yes
N/A	Napoleonic-era Lookout and Signal Tower	ca. late 18 th – early 19 th	Achill	One day was spent recording the extant architectural remains	No

Table 1. Summary of activity undertaken on maritime sites around Achill Island, 2006 field season (continued)

Licence No.	Wreck name	Year lost	Location	Activity on site	Summary in this report
N/A	Gallagher Yawl	Built ca.80-100 yrs ago	Corraun Peninsula	This Achill yawl, still a functional vessel, was recorded and the lines taken off in 2005. These drawings have been completed and are presented in this report.	Yes