

HERITAGE OBJECTS ASSOCIATED WITH FARMING & FISHING IN COUNTY DONEGAL

FINAL REPORT



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MAY 2011

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE
Dhún na nGall
DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL



An Chomhairle Oidhreachtach
The Heritage Council



An Action of the County Donegal Heritage Plan

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1. INTRODUCTION

This audit of heritage objects associated with farming and fishing identifies the sources of information, and repositories, for heritage objects associated with farming and fishing in County Donegal. It outlines the nature, condition and extent of collections and access to them. Emphasis is placed on heritage objects that are held within the county. The historical, cultural, societal, and economic contexts for the heritage objects are also established.

A lot of people helped us with the audit. In particular, we would like to thank Joseph Gallagher, Sean Beattie, Gerald Roarty, Donncha Ó Baoill, Fidelma Mullane, Séamas Mac Philib, Dónal Mac Polin and Darina Tully for their efficiency and kindness.

The audit of heritage objects associated with farming and fishing in County Donegal is an action of the County Donegal Heritage Plan and was commissioned by the County Donegal Heritage Office, Cultural Services, Donegal County Council; The Heritage Council & the County Donegal Heritage Forum.

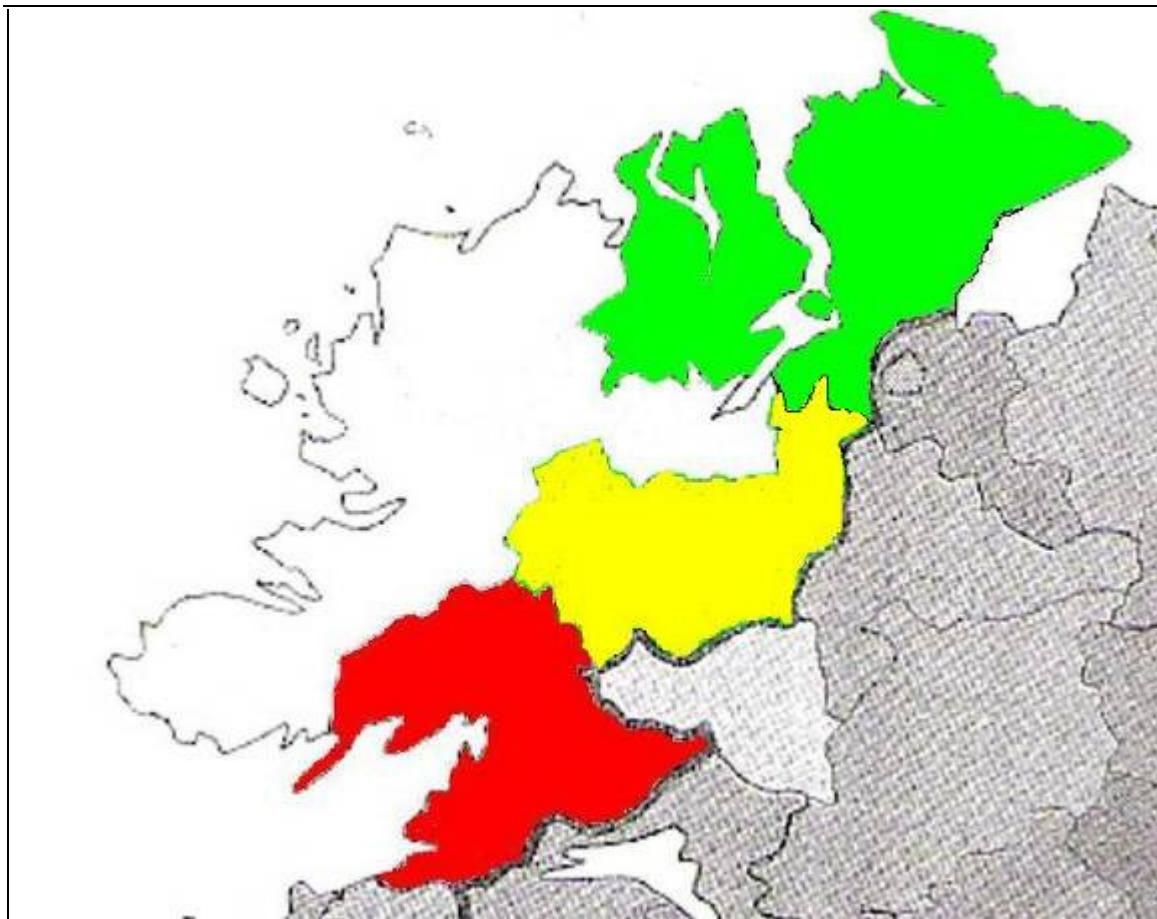
2. AUDIT OF HERITAGE OBJECTS ASSOCIATED WITH FARMING

The audit has confirmed the diversity and richness of Donegal's farming heritage. The county is a microcosm of Irish agricultural history. Donegal has farms ranging in scale from large, wealthy centres of production integrated with international technological improvement to tiny holdings whose main function was to provide a subsistence living for one farming family. It is at this latter level that we look for locally-designed implements associated with labour intensive but ingenious and refined techniques.

More than three hundred implements were examined for the audit, and around 250 of these have been documented. Obviously, this is only a tiny fraction of the items that could have been included but we hope that it provides parameters within which other material can be placed. Most of the objects examined date from the mid-nineteenth to the later twentieth centuries. They include highly developed horse-operated implements, early tractor technology and a number of hand tools that can be connected to much older farming methods.

A few of the horse-operated implements recorded were made by local blacksmiths and carpenters but most were industrial products of foundries such as Pierce of Wexford, Ransomes of Ipswich and Jack of Maybole. However, at least one plough included was manufactured in Brown's Foundry in Letterkenny. All of these implements are fairly standardised in construction. By the end of the era of horse work, this standardisation meant that implements such as wheel ploughs could be made up of parts produced in different foundries, and even different countries. This range of farm machinery is particularly associated with commercial farms and we would expect such farms to be most common in the fertile lowlands of the county, especially the Laggan. This expectation was confirmed by the audit.

2.1. DONEGAL'S MAIN FARMING AREAS



Key:

- █ Small dairy and cattle farms
- █ Main arable farming area
- █ Dairy farms and some arable land
- Mostly rough grazing and bog

Small farms were most common in the west of the county and other areas of hilly, marginal land. The 'common' systems of farming practiced in these areas relied a lot on manual labour and it was in these areas we expected to find hand tools of various kinds. This too was largely confirmed although we also found locally-made artifacts in the east

and north of the county. There were some surprising gaps in the hand tools recorded which will be discussed below.

Old tractors, and implements powered by them, are perhaps the best-preserved items in private ownership in the county. This is not surprising, given the market value of many of these machines. However, as with horse-operated equipment and manual tools, case studies of farms show that this advanced technology was part of distinctive systems of farming and social relationships within the county and, as with the earlier technology, the best way to understand the significance of implements is to look at their place within these systems.

We found relatively few objects directly associated with livestock farming which since the Great Famine has been generally growing in importance in agricultural production within Donegal, as within the rest of Ireland. The importance of livestock is more adequately expressed in the growing number of outbuildings associated with their care and management but these buildings were largely outside the scope of the present audit.

2.2. SIGNIFICANT FARMING OBJECTS IDENTIFIED

Significant objects were found in all of the categories outlined above.

2.2.1. Hand Tools

Many implements used in manual farm work are very simple in construction and it is only by examining how they were used that we can understand the sophistication of the farming methods with which they are associated. Fieldwork interviews made in the Gaeltacht confirmed the central place of oral evidence in providing this context.

Spades

This was the single biggest gap in the audit. Despite requests to the local Irish Farmers' Association (IFA), the local press and passed by word-of-mouth, we failed to find one distinctively Donegal pattern of spade (Figure 1). One farmer we talked to suggested that this was because spades were used until they were worn out. However, we were able to record new information about spades and spadework from Johnny Ghráinne of Rann na Feirste / Rannafast and future work on the subject should concentrate on collecting such testimonies.

Donegal has a complex history of spade technology and, indeed, in recent years the champion spadesman of Ireland has been a Donegal man. One reason suggested for the lack of spade cultivation in the county is that many seasonal migrants to Scotland learnt techniques used on commercial farms there and began to use these back home. The use of raised drills, rather than ridges, for cultivating potatoes might be an example of this cultural transfer. The older patterns of spades would have been less crucial for making drills.



Figure 1: Children of Joseph Cunningham of An Charraig / Carrick holding a Donegal spade and a racán in 1957 (Photo courtesy of National Museum of Ireland)

Fortunately, both the National Museum (Turlough Park) and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum have Donegal spades in their collections. The National Museum collection is particularly important in that it has one-sided spades known as loys, collected in Donegal. The use of loys in the county is mentioned in early nineteenth century texts but not more recently.

Cibín

‘Kibbing’ was a method of planting potatoes that was especially associated with Donegal. It was often done using a spade but a small hand implement (cibín) was also used. One of these is displayed in St Connell’s Museum (Figure 2) and there is also an example in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum.



Figure.2: A cibín displayed in St Connell’s Museum, Glenties

Racán

The use of a heavy rake (racán) to cover grain seed sown on narrow cultivation ridges is described in Lord George Hill's *Facts From Gweedore* (1838). We did not find any surviving examples in the county but the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum has the head of a racán in its collection and a photograph of an example from Gaoth Dobhair / Gweedore. The National Museum has photographs of an example from near An Charraig / Carrick in the south of the county (Figure 1).

Sickle (Corrán cíorach)

We found one example of a toothed sickle and several examples of smooth bladed reaping hook (Figure 3). Reaping with a sickle was the skill for which migrant workers from Gaoth Dobhair / Gweedore were most famous.



Figure 3: A reaping hook in the Fr. McDyer Folk Village, Gleann Cholm Cille / Glencolmcille

The lack of survival of spades, racáin and sickles shows the importance of oral testimony and photographic archives in preserving knowledge of the most distinctive farming techniques within the county. Seán Ó Gallchóir of Mín an Iolair / Meenanillar, for example, recited a prayer from Gaoth Dobhair in which God was asked to send wind and rain to the harvest fields of Scotland so that farmers there would have to depend on Donegal reapers to save the crop:

Paidir sa mháigh fá choinne gaoth anoir 's fearthainn aniar

A prayer in the plain for wind from the east and rain from the west

Flails

We found two flails during fieldwork for the audit preserved in Ionad Cois Locha, Dún Lúiche / Dunlewey and the Fr. McDyer Folk Village, Gleann Cholm Cille / Glencolmcille. Photographs of flails in use are preserved in both the National Museum and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum (Figure 4).



Figure 4: A flail in use on Toraigh / Tory Island circa 1930
(Photo courtesy of Thomas Mason)

Winnowing trays

Winnowing trays or sieves are preserved in the Fr. McDyer Folk Village. These have a bodhran-type construction. Two very unusual trays were recorded at Feddyglass. These are made of coiled straw rope (*súgán*), a technique of construction which may have been used for several millennia (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Two winnowing trays made from straw rope (*súgán*), preserved on a farm at Feddyglass

2.2.2. Horse-Powered Implements

The full range of objects associated with horse-powered farming can still be found within the county. These included:

Ploughs

Perhaps the most interesting plough we found during fieldwork is displayed in Rutherford's yard in Kilmacrennan (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Swing plough in Rutherford's yard, Kilmacrennan

This is a swing plough, manufactured in Brown's Foundry in Letterkenny. Scottish-style swing (wheel-less) ploughs of this construction had become the most widespread type of plough used in Ireland by the 1830s. However, it is relatively rare to find one which has been made in a small local foundry. A plough with attachments for harvesting potatoes is also displayed in Rutherford's yard.

Wooden drill ploughs (Figure 7), used mostly in potato cultivation, were found at Carrowmenagh and at Ballyliffin. These are important because they were made by local craftsmen and show some local variations in design.

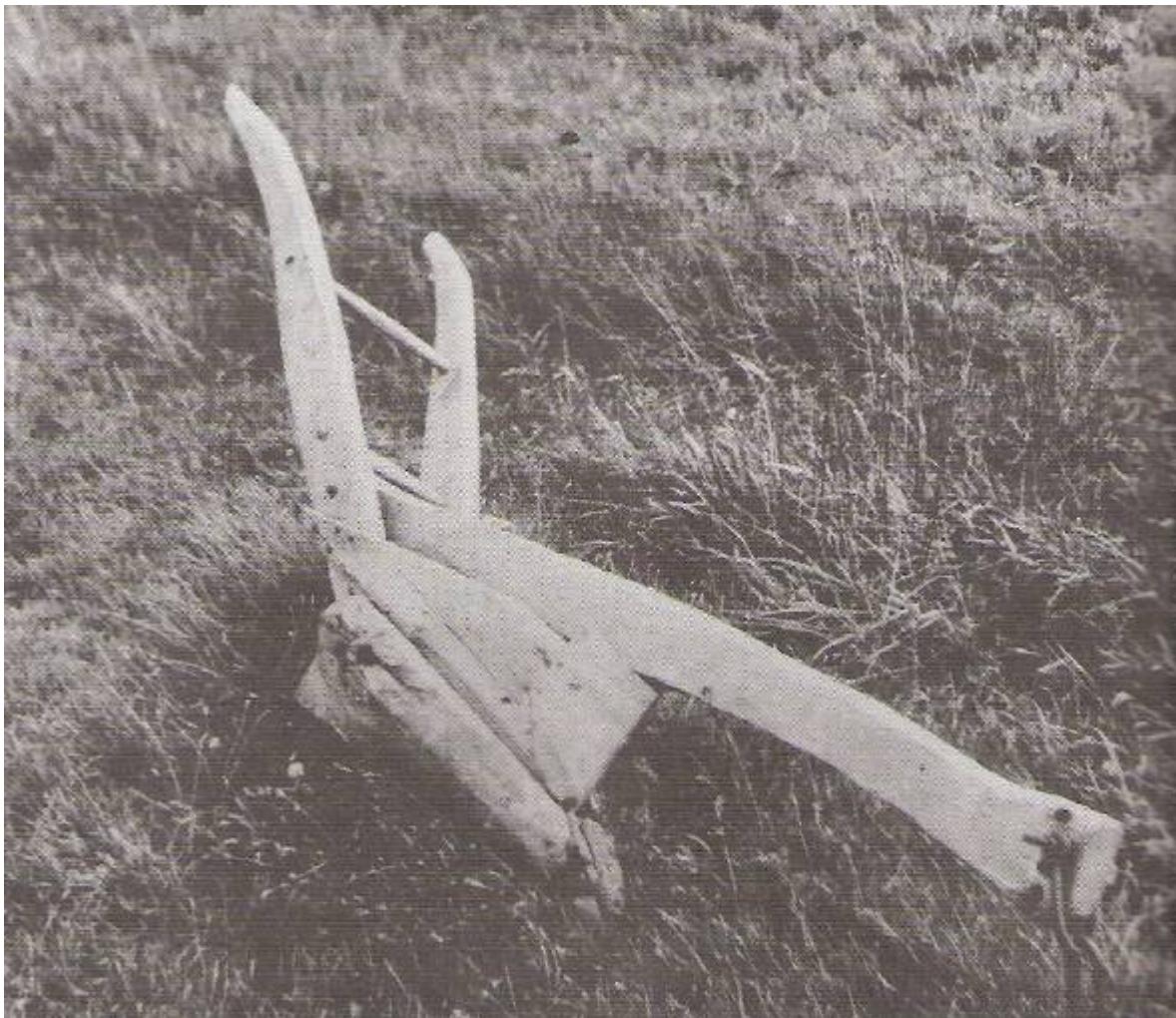


Figure 7: Wooden drill plough at Dún Lúiche / Dunlewey
(Photo courtesy of Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin)

'Universal body' ploughs were found in four locations in the north and west of the county (Figures 8 & 9). These ploughs were developed at the Albert Agricultural College in the late nineteenth century as implements that could easily be converted to fulfill other functions.

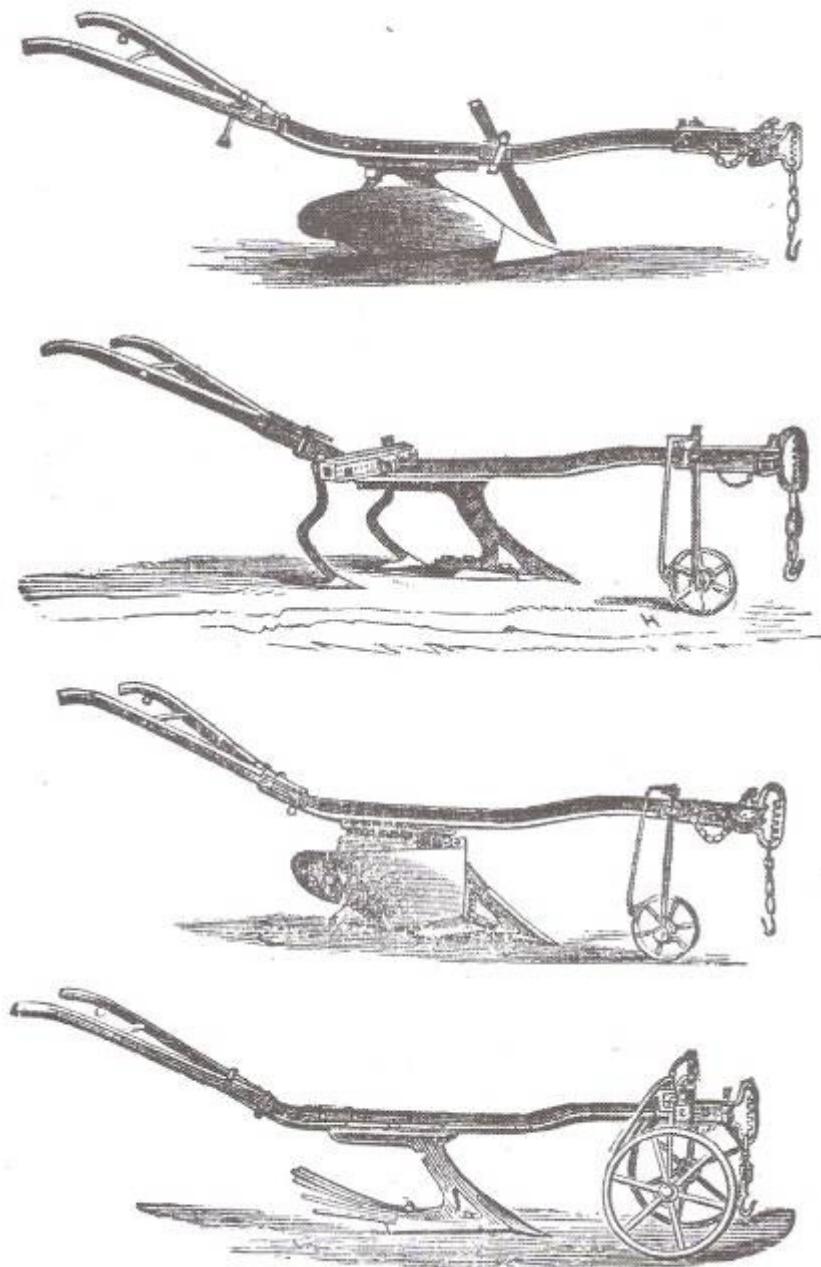


Figure 8: The Glasnevin Combined Implement
(Source: Baldwin, T. *Handy Book of Small Farm Management*, Dublin, 1870, p. 35)



Figure 9: Universal body plough at Carraig Airt / Carrigart

The distribution suggests that the multi-purpose implements were adopted after encouragement to local small farmers by bodies such as the Congested Districts Board and/or the Department for Agriculture and Technical Instruction.

Harrows

The most interesting harrows we recorded are displayed outside Teach Mhúiris on the Cnoc Fola / Bloody Foreland (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Harrow at Teach Mhúiris, Cnoc Fola / Bloody Foreland

This single-frame harrow was, probably, locally made and shows features described and criticised as ‘common’ by early nineteenth-century observers. The most important of these features is the rectangular construction of the harrow frame which improvers claimed tended to make the tines (spikes) of the harrow on each bar of the frame follow one another in the same track instead of breaking-up separate lines of earth. As with early nineteenth-century harrows, however, farmers prevented this happening when using the Teach Mhúiris harrow by attaching the draught chain to one corner of the frame, so that it was dragged along the ground at an angle and constructing the harrow so that the

implement was loosely enough attached to the harness that it could shuffle from side to side as it was pulled.

Flax-bruising wheels

These stone wheels were used to crush flax that had been ‘retted’ and dried. Two examples were found displayed as ornaments in the garden of the Glebe outside Dunfanaghy (Figure 11) and we were told that another wheel is sometimes visible at the bottom of Sessiagh Lake.



Figure 11: Flax-bruising wheel at the Glebe, Dunfanaghy

Horse-powered threshing machines

We examined several of these and were told of the existence of several more. By the mid-nineteenth century, their construction was fairly standardised. The machines we recorded were manufactured outside the county (in Coleraine and Scotland) which probably means that they were installed after the Donegal railway network had opened the county up for the transport of heavy goods.

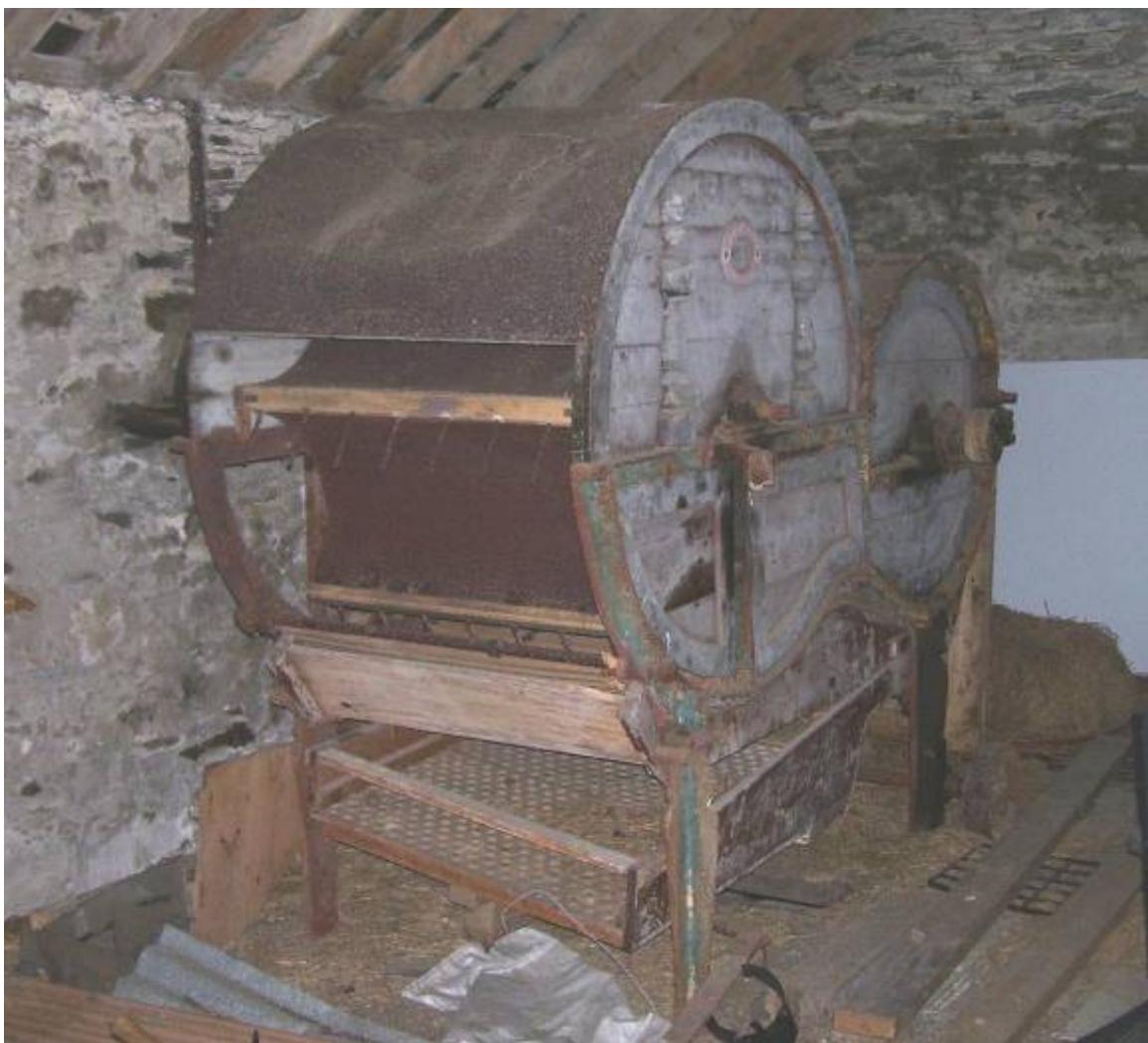


Figure 12: Threshing machine at Baile Chonaill / Ballyconnell, An Fál Carrach / Falcarragh

Seamus O'Donnell, who showed us a threshing machine on his family farm in Baile Chonaill / Ballyconnell (Figure 12), told us that an old neighbour remembered lines of carts in the lane outside the farm with farmers waiting to use the machine. This is a rare

example of mechanisation leading to increased co-operation between neighbours. In most cases, the introduction of labour-saving machinery such as threshing machines was claimed to have made farmers more independent of one another, ‘less friendly.’

Sets of horse-drawn implements

The different kinds of implement found on a farm can allow us to reconstruct the system of farming used. This meant that sometimes even broken pieces of implement were sometimes worth recording. A clear example of this was at Feddyglass where we found fragmentary evidence of parts of horse harness and swing trees, a wheel plough, a seed drill, a horse-drawn reaper, a reaper binder and a horse walk for churning butter and possibly threshing grain.

In general, the ways in which sets of implements were used provide one of the clearest ways to build up a picture of work and working relationships between people on any farm.

2.2.3. Tractor Technology

Tractors and associated machinery are the best-preserved heritage objects in Donegal. Collections range from early Fordson to Ferguson tractors and enthusiasts have even collected tractors from outside the county, and even outside Ireland.



Figure 13: Tractors at Wylie's Farm

At least three vintage threshing machines are also preserved in working order and can be seen at Vintage events, organised annually.

Sets of tractor implements

Tractor technology is global but the way the machinery is integrated into Donegal farming life can produce distinctive patterns. A case study of a family farm, such as Friel's farm near Letterkenny, can show how the technology fitted in with, and modified, working relationships within the family.

2.3. CONDITION OF FARMING OBJECTS

The state of preservation of the objects recorded varied markedly. Some artifacts are carefully preserved and displayed in local heritage centres: St. Connell's Museum in Glenties (Figure 14), Fr. McDyer Folk Village in Gleann Cholm Cille / Glencolmcille, and Ionad Cois Locha in Dún Lúiche / Dunlewey. A number of private collections also preserve excellent material, notably Matthew and Betty Graham's collection at Ardagh. Most collections in private hands, however, preserve motorised farming technology and particularly tractors. Alan Wylie's collection outside Letterkenny is a fine example of this type of collection.



Figure 14: Dairy equipment displayed in St. Connell's Museum, Glenties

Some horse-drawn implements and machines are preserved and displayed as decoration. These might be in gardens or simply set along the roadside. The collection of horse-drawn machinery at Loch an Iúir / Loughanure is also primarily a decorative public display (Figure 15).



Figure 15: Horse-drawn farm implements displayed by the roadside in Loch an Iúir / Loughanure



Figure 16: Farm implements displayed outside Teach Mhúiris on the Cnoc Fola/ Bloody Foreland

However, many of the implements recorded for the audit were lying in heaps or even discarded completely (Figure 17). All these objects are evidence of the county's farming history and, where possible, they should be rescued and preserved.



Figure 17: A horse-drawn hay rake in undergrowth at Baile Chonaill / Ballyconnell

3. AUDIT OF HERITAGE OBJECTS ASSOCIATED WITH FISHING

3.1. OVERVIEW

The audit confirmed Donegal's key place in Irish maritime heritage. People have eaten fish in Donegal since prehistoric times and evidence for sea-going boats is also very ancient. The Laws of Ireland, written down in the eighth to ninth centuries, show that by the Early Christian period, fishing was an important occupation.

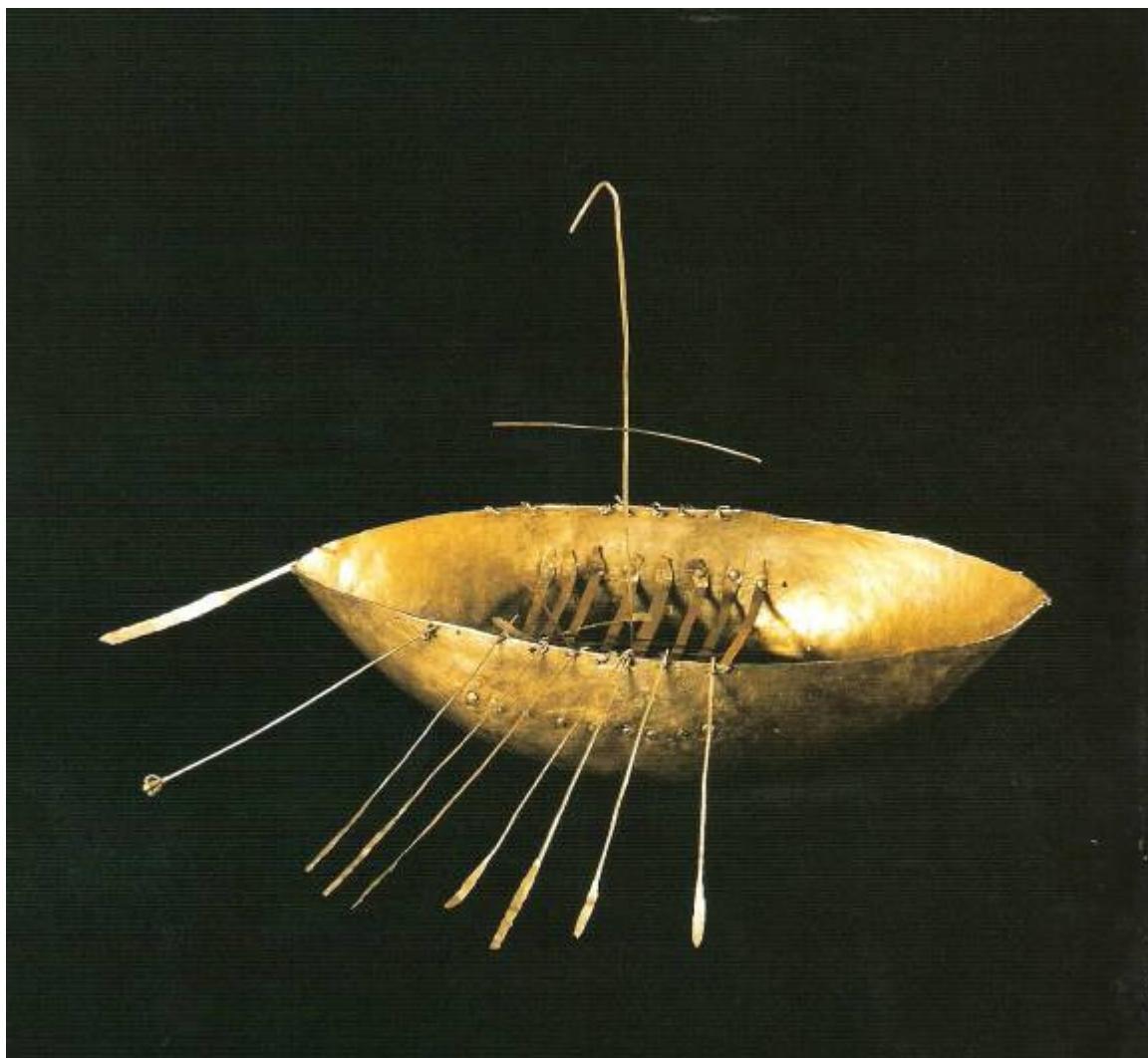


Figure 18: This boat dates from the first century BC. It was found at Broighter just across Lough Foyle from Inishowen, County Donegal.
(Photo courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland)

In the late seventh century the following story was written about Donegal's most famous saint, Colmcille: "Some busy fishermen . . . had caught five fishes in the River Sale, where fish are plentiful, and the saint said to them, 'Cast again your net into the river, and you will immediately find a great fish which the Lord has provided for me.' They obeyed the saint's word, and hauled in with their net a salmon of marvelous size, provided for them by God."

Many old Irish terms connected to fishing derive from the Norse languages, showing the Viking influence on fishing methods in the county.

Commercial fishing was well established in Donegal by the 1400s, a lot of it controlled by the Lords of Tirconaill, the O'Donnells.



Figure 19: The Aileach, a replica of a boat used in the Hebrides and the west of Ireland during the Middle Ages. The boat was built at Moville, at McDonald's boat yard, in 1991.
(Photo courtesy of Lord of the Isles Galley Trust)

By the 1770s, at least one very large-scale fishing business operated on Inch Island on Lough Swilly: “Here is the great resort of vessels for the herring industry; it begins the middle of October, and ends about Christmas . . . last year 500 boats were employed in it: the farmers and coast inhabitants build them and send them out.” (Arthur Young, 1780)

Larger ‘ships’, from 20 to 100 tons, were also used. In the 1770s, it was claimed that boats from all over Europe came to fish in Lough Swilly. In 1775, ‘the number of herring in the Lough was so great, the fellows said it was difficult to row through them.’

3.1.1. The Congested Districts Board

In the late nineteenth century, fishing was mostly part-time work in Donegal. The Congested Districts Board, which was set up in 1891, helped to transform the industry by building piers and giving loans for boats and nets. The Board was also active in setting up fish curing plants and cooperages, where the barrels were made in which fish were stored.



**Figure 20: The pier at Machaire Loiscthe / Rosapenna
(Photo courtesy of National Museum, Northern Ireland)**

In the 1890s, developments in commercial fishing were concentrated in places such as Na Dúnaibh / Downings in north Donegal and Teileann / Teelin in the southwest. A lot of new methods were introduced from Scotland. For example: in the 1890s, thirteen fish curers from Shetland were brought over by the Congested Districts Board and instructors were employed to teach local fishermen how to use larger boats and nets.



Figure 21: The pier at Na Dúnaibh / Downings, in Sheephaven Bay, built by the Congested Districts Board in 1893 (Photo courtesy of National Museum, Northern Ireland)



**Figure 22: Fish curing at Na Dúnaibh / Downings
(Photo courtesy of National Museum, Northern Ireland)**

3.1.2. Types of Fish

Herring (Scadán)

In the early twentieth century when herring were plentiful in Sheephaven Bay, the fishing season was August to October. In the mid-twentieth century, Killybegs fishermen mostly fished for herring in winter. Herring are *pelagic* fish – they swim in shoals in the middle and upper levels of the open sea.

Haddock (Cadóg)

Killybegs fishermen fished for haddock most of the year, apart from around April, a period known as ‘the famine months’.

Whiting (Gealán)

White fish

Cod (Trosc)

Cod are known as *demersal* fish because they live near the sea floor. Killybegs fishermen fished for cod mostly in spring. They are very sensitive to water temperature.

Salmon (Bradán)

Lobster (Gliomach)

Mackerel (Ronnach)

Mackerel, like herring, are pelagic – they swim in shoals in the middle and upper levels of the sea. Fishing for mackerel is now a major part of the Irish fishing industry.

3.1.3. Fishing Boats & Fishing Methods

Currachs were commonly used by part-time fishermen until the mid-twentieth century.

There are several types of currach still used in Donegal. In the 1900s, there were four main classes of commercial herring boats: steam drifters, motor boats, sailing boats of the ‘Zulu’ type, and open Greencastle yawls. Steam drifters could fish all year, but because of their cost and the need for technical support, only five were in use by 1914.

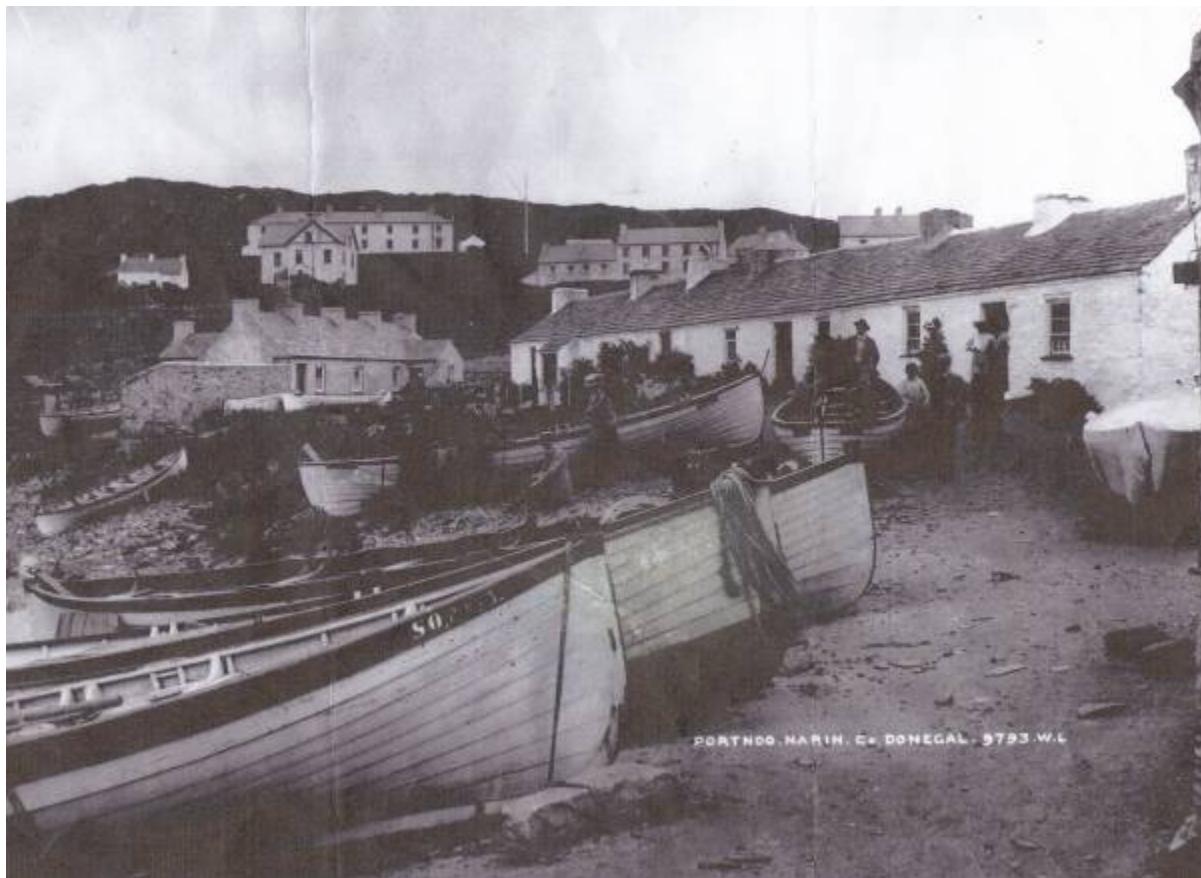


Figure 23: Greencastle yawls on the beach at Portnoo, c.1900
(Photo courtesy of National Library of Ireland)

Motor boats were used in north Donegal by 1915 but in 1922, boat owners were said to be making losses because of the high cost of fuel and the low prices paid for fish.

In the 1920s, most boats used in Killybegs were Greencastle yawls (also known as Drontheims) with keels about 20 feet (6 metres) long. In the 1930s, the Irish Fisheries Association had boats built that were 36 feet (10.8 metres) long. After this, boats grew in

size. The limit for a wooden hull was about 75 feet (22.5 metres) and in the 1970s, bigger boats were built with steel hulls.

3.1.4. Fishing Methods

Long line fishing was used for catching fish such as cod, pollock and flat fish. Long lines could be up to 300 metres in length, with between 100 and 600 hooks attached. The hooks were baited with sand eels or slugs. Lines were often left anchored to a rock overnight or during the day. Two dozen fish on a line was considered a reasonable catch.



Figure 24: Baiting a long line. This photo was taken on Rathlin Island, County Antrim around 1900 (Photo courtesy of National Museum, Northern Ireland)



Figure 25: Digging for sand eels for bait in Mulroy Bay
(Photo courtesy of National Museum, Northern Ireland)

Larval forms of sand eels are good bait for cod, ling, plaice, sole and turbot.

Types of net:

Trawl nets are made in the shape of a funnel. The net is pulled through the sea and the fish swim into the mouth of the funnel. In ‘pair trawling’, the nets are towed between two boats that might be up to 400 metres apart. This was a common method in Killybegs for *pelagic* fishing (fishing for shoals of fish such as herring).

Seine nets are made up of a bag with wings on either side. The net is stretched between the fishing boat and a buoy, and when fish are caught in it, the boat steams ahead herding the fish into the net

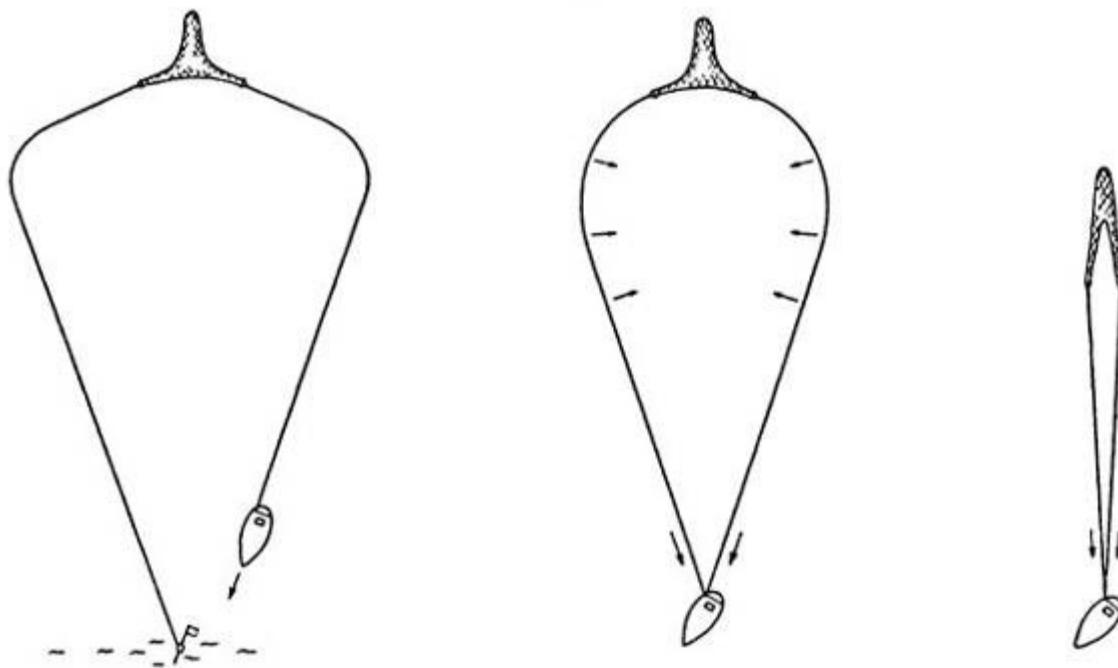
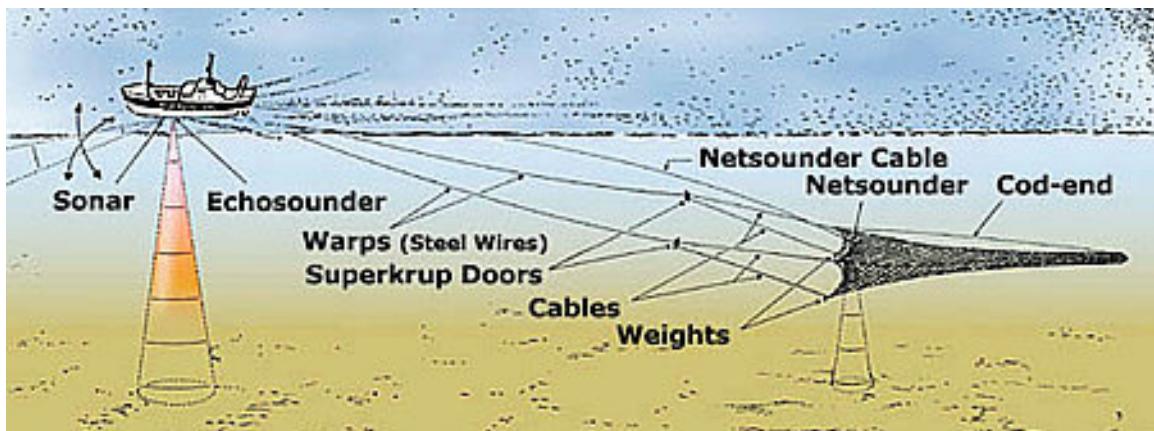


Figure 26: A bird’s eye view of a seine net being closed to trap fish
(Illustration courtesy of Bord Iascaigh Mhara)

Gill nets were used in smaller boats. The net was made up of different sections. When these were put end to end, they could stretch 1,500 metres. Fish swimming into the net are caught by the gills.



Before the development of echo sounders, sonar and radar which allow fishermen to detect shoals of fish, local coastal fishermen were the best guide to the whereabouts of shoals. Fishermen also used the presence of sea birds as a guide: ‘If they were looking for herring, they would go by the birds . . . If you see a bird sitting on the water, there’s fish.’

Crews

A system of dividing cost and profits by shares between members of a boat’s crew was well established by 1780. The English traveller, Arthur Young found that on Lough Swilly ‘Five men take a boat, each man half a share, each net half, and the whole boat one.’ Variations on this system operated on yawls and skiffs and on motorised boats in Killybegs. In 1936, for example, James McLeod of Killybegs had a crew of four on his boat, the *Martha Helen*. As the owner, James received half the value of the catch and the rest was divided between the crew.

3.1.5. The Growth of Killybegs

In the 1580s, the O'Donnells controlled the fishing rights to the sea around Killybegs and by 1776, sixty fishing boats were based in the harbour. In 1844, it was recorded that several hundred sail of vessels have been known to be in Killybegs at one time, purchasing or curing herring.

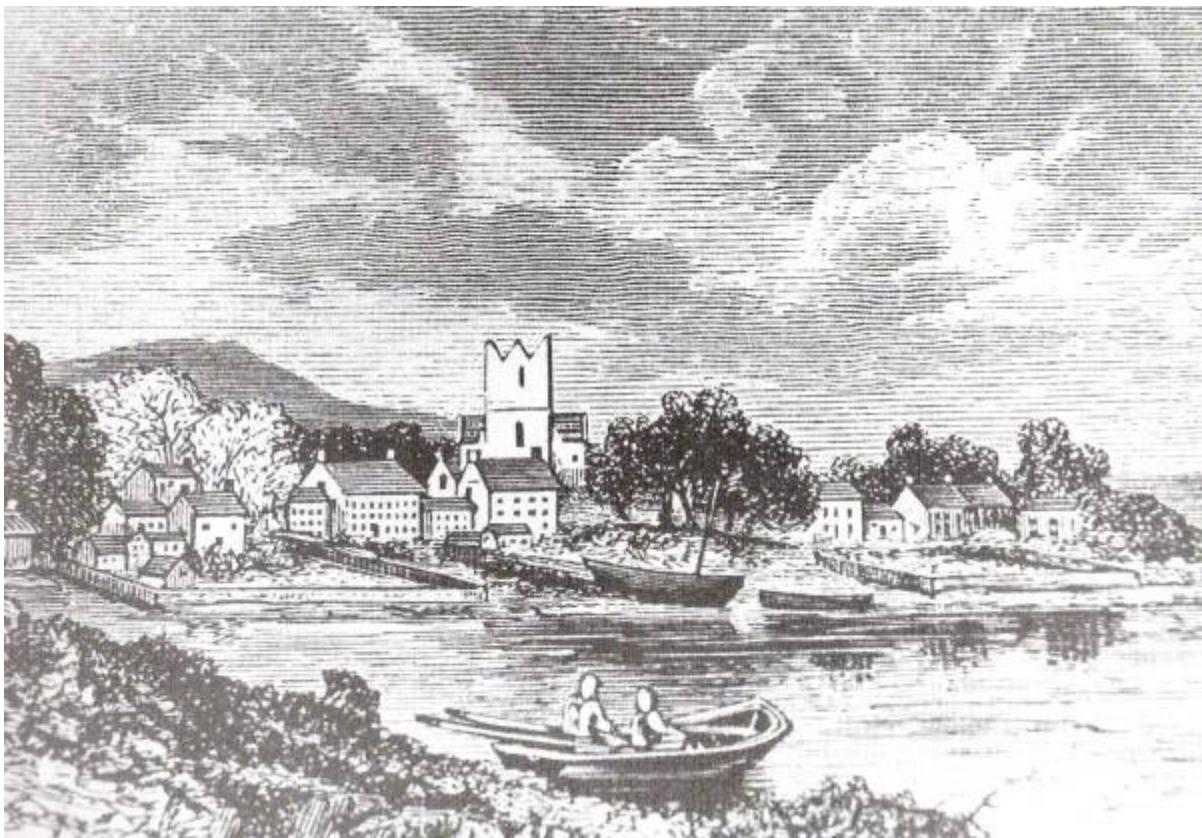


Figure 27: Killybegs in 1860

In 1890, large numbers of mackerel were caught, salted and cured in Killybegs. The building of a railway to the town in 1893 opened up markets for fish in Derry and Dublin.



Figure 28: Killybegs wooden pier built by the Congested Districts Board in 1897. This was replaced by a concrete pier in the 1950s. The boats are typical of the period – a ‘nicky’, a ‘nobby’ and in the foreground, three ‘drontheims’ (Photo courtesy of National Museum, Northern Ireland)

In the 1920s, there were three years when fishermen made huge catches in the waters around Killybegs. Scottish and English boats were attracted to the area, and there were sometimes up to eighty boats in the harbour.

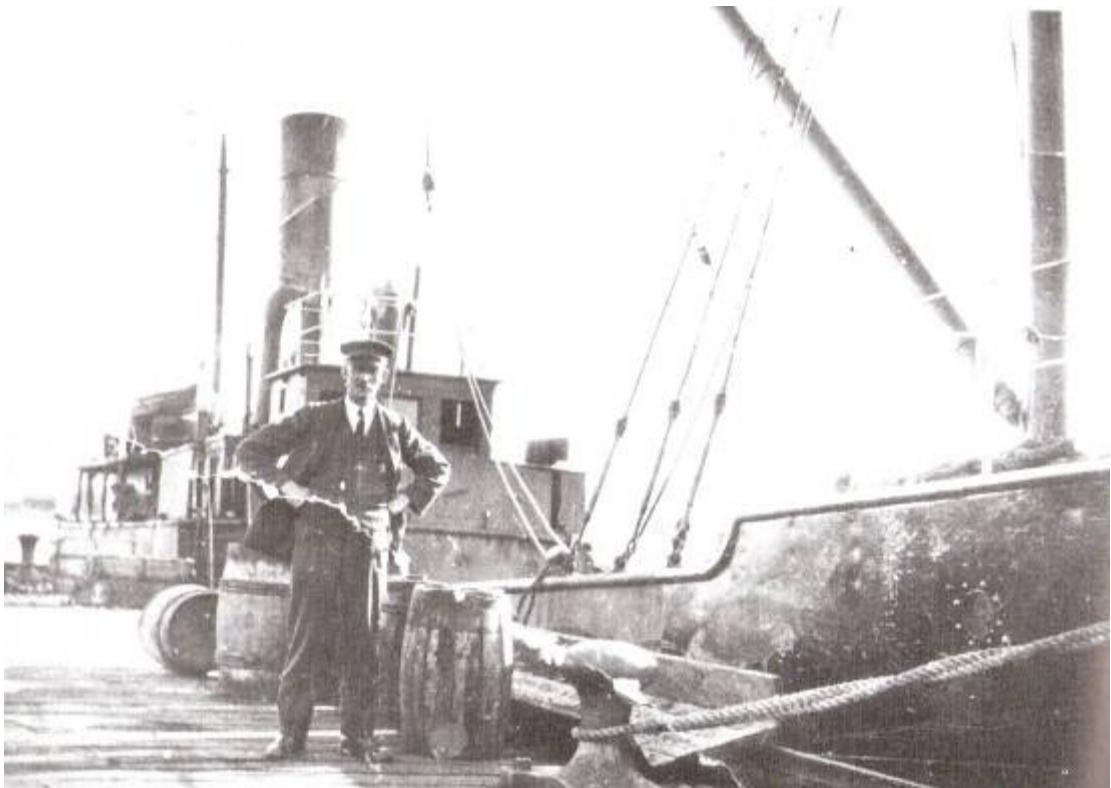


Figure 29: Edward Conwell, Harbour Master at Killybegs in 1928

Source: Martin, D. (1998). *Killybegs: Then & Now* (Dublin: Donald Martin in association with Anvil Books, p. 38)

By 1900, boat building had been established in Killybegs in a small shed. By 1920, about ten men were employed in the yard. The boatyard was taken over by Bord Iascaigh Mhara (The Fisheries Board) in 1948 and, in recent years, it has been run successfully by Mooney Boats.



Figure 30: Boats being painted in Kelly's Yard, Killybegs, in 1958

Source: Martin, D. (1998). *Killybegs: Then & Now* (Dublin: Donald Martin in association with Anvil Books, p. 41)

In the 1950s, there were about 50 boats in the Killybegs fleet and the town is now the biggest fishing port in Ireland.



3.1.6. Selling Fish

Fish curing stations were set up by the Congested Districts Board from the 1890s onwards, but the board sold most of these to fish merchants who ran them commercially.

In the 1930s, fishermen in Killybegs were unhappy with the prices they were receiving for their catches from fish merchants and they applied to the Sea Fisheries Association for membership. The Association had a price list for cod, whiting and other fish, and organised the sale of the fish in Dublin.

Bord Iascaigh Mhara was set up by an act in Dáil Éireann in 1952. The board aims to provide resources for the fishing industry.

3.1.7. Fish Gutters

Women were employed in shore-based fishing work such as gathering bait, baiting lines, fish gutting and curing. In 1780, it was estimated that a ton of salt would cure 10,000 herring. Barrels were made in Donegal using imported timber staves. The Lough Swilly operation was very large scale, the aim being to cure 100,000 herring a day. Forty boys, women and girls were employed in gutting the fish which were then passed to men for salting and placing in barrels.



Figure 31: Scottish fish curers working in Killybegs in 1928

Source: Martin, D. (1998). *Killybegs: Then & Now* (Dublin: Donald Martin in association with Anvil Books, p. 80)

In the early 1900s, many fish curers in Donegal came from Scotland for seasonal work but Donegal women soon excelled at curing and, in the 1930s, groups of up to a hundred women from Na Rosa / The Rosses would travel to Britain to work in fish curing. The women moved around between places as far apart as the Shetland Islands and Great Yarmouth.

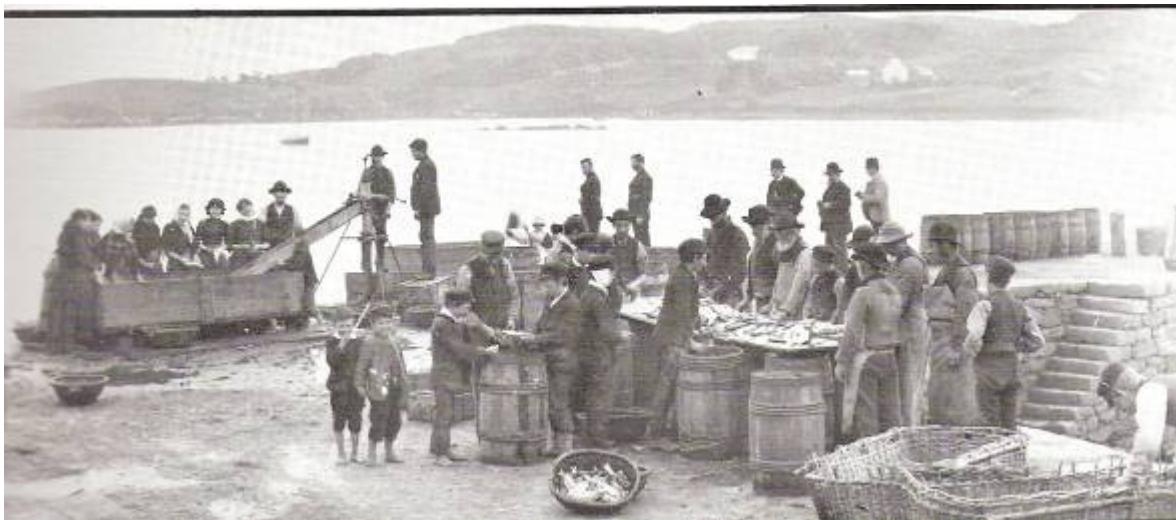


Figure 32: Curing fish on the pier at Killybegs in 1890
(Photo courtesy of National Museum, Northern Ireland)

Working arrangements for gutting fish were the same in many ports. Fishermen unloaded the fish into a long trough known as a ‘farlan’. Women stood on each side of the trough and gutted the fish which were then thrown into tubs. Young men carried the tubs to a larger ‘roosin’ tub, where salt was scooped over the fish. The fish were then removed and packed in barrels in tiers.

Fish girls worked in teams of three. In Shetland, the Donegal women were housed in small wooden huts that stretched for three miles outside Lerwick. Socialising at nights was intense. Hugh Paddy Óg Ward from An Céideadh / Keadea said that “It was the sport that kept them going – the fun.”

3.1.8. Recent History

Ireland joined the European Economic Community in 1971. Many fishermen believed that fishing rights were bartered away to the EEC in return for agricultural gains.

Some Killybegs fishermen, such as Seamus Tully and Teddy O’Shea, took the initiative and invested in bigger boats. The whole fishing operation increased in scale with hundreds of tons of fish being landed and bigger fish processing plants were needed.

By 2000, the Irish fishing fleet was made up of about 1,300 boats of more than 10 metres in length. The main fishing harbours in Ireland are Killybegs, County Donegal; Castletown Bearhaven, County Cork; Rathmullan, County Donegal; Howth, County Dublin; and Greencastle, County Donegal.

There are still many traditional boats in the county and a significant number of them are still in use. In our audit, we were able to use Dónal Mac Polin’s excellent research and publications on both currachs and drontheims. Fishing equipment in the county has also been studied, by Darina Tully, who also generously shared her knowledge with us. However, the need to document and collect material related to fishing is urgent. Irish language testimonies related to fishing and poaching should be recorded as soon as possible, as the detailed technical vocabulary connected to both activities is disappearing fast.

3.2. SIGNIFICANT FISHING OBJECTS IDENTIFIED

Fishing boats are the most obvious artifacts related to sea fishing.

3.2.1. Currachs

Currachs were recorded on piers at An Bun Beag / Bunbeg and Machaire Uí Rabhartaigh / Magheraroarty. One currach of an Uaigh / Owey Island (Currach Céasla) construction was recorded at An Bun Beag / Bunbeg (Figure 33) and a Toraigh / Tory Island currach (Figure 37) was recorded at Machaire Uí Rabhartaigh / Magheraroarty.



Figure 33: Uaigh / Owey Island type currach at An Bun Beag / Bunbeg



Figure 34: Toraigh / Tory Island type currach at Machaire Uí Rabhartaigh / Magheraroarty

Other currachs were of the Sheephaven and Fánaid / Fanad types.



Figure 35: Partly-constructed Sheephaven currach in Inishowen Maritime Museum, Greencastle



Figure 36: Fánaid / Fanad-type currach in Inishowen Maritime Museum, Greencastle

The National Museum (Turlough Park) has five Donegal currachs, illustrating the main types identified by Dónal Mac Polin. The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum has three Donegal currachs. Derry Harbour Museum has a very large currach, built in 1963, and sailed and rowed to Iona to commemorate the 1400th anniversary of St. Colmcille's mission to Iona.

3.2.2. Greencastle Yawls (Drontheims)

These were very numerous around piers at An Bun Beag / Bunbeg, Machaire Uí Rabhartaigh / Magheraroarty, Greencastle and Rathmullan, and can be found at piers as small as those at Málainn Mhóir / Malin More (Figure 37) and Málainn Bhig / Malin Beg. Many of these boats are fitted with engines and a considerable number appear to be still in use (Figure 38). Smaller versions of the yawls, known as ‘punts’ or ‘skiffs’, are also common.



Figure 37: Dronheim at Málainn Mhóir / Malin More



Figure 38: Drontheim with engine, Machaire Uí Rabhartaigh / Magheraroarty

3.2.3. Larger Fishing Boats

These boats have not yet been researched to the same extent as currachs and drontheims but they have a range of hull and engine types and an organised research programme dealing with them is overdue.



Figure 39: Fishing boat at Machaire Loiscthe (also referred to locally as Ros na Binne) / Rosapenna

3.2.4. Fishing Equipment

We did not find any evidence for the systematic collection of fishing equipment, either within the county or in national institutions. The Inishowen Maritime Museum in Greencastle has a long line box (Figure 40) and the National Museum has a ‘reel’ from Donegal.



Figure 40: Long Line Box in Inishowen Maritime Museum, Greencastle

The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum has some fishing equipment but it is largely undocumented so we could identify only one item (lug-worm spear) that had originated in Donegal. Collection of equipment and audio-visual material related to fishing and poaching should be the priority for any future development.

Darina Tully pointed out to us that Donegal has its own set of lobster pot designs. Many surviving lobster pots are made from modern plastics but as they do show local ingenuity, we suggest that the definition of a heritage object should be broadened to include this series (Figure 41).



Figure 41: Lobster pots at Málainn Bhig / Malin Beg

3.3. CONDITION OF FISHING OBJECTS

Inishowen Maritime Museum in Greencastle is the only significant institution displaying and conserving boat types (Figure 42).



Figure 42: Inishowen Maritime Museum, Greencastle

The National Museum and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum have currachs in their collections but the only drontheim in the latter institution was given to Greencastle in 1985. Drontheims are still quite numerous in Donegal but evidence of those left at piers shows that they can deteriorate very quickly if left in the open. Dónal Mac Polin has told us that on Toraigh / Tory, there are currachs lying outside with grass growing through a number of them. As we pointed out above, no institution that we found, national or local, has a significant collection of artifacts related to fishing and poaching.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Agricultural Heritage

- **Collection.** The history of Donegal agriculture can be effectively told using heritage objects surviving in the county and preserved in museum collections elsewhere. We recommend that a collection policy for these objects should be developed and systematic acquisition commenced as soon as possible.
- **Archival research.** Institutions within Donegal, the National Library, the National Museum (Turlough Park), the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and elsewhere have important collections of photographs relating to the county's farming past. A systematic programme should be developed to acquire copies of these for a central collection. This would be an extension of the work already undertaken in the County Library.
- **Oral archives.** There is a considerable amount of material relevant to Donegal's agricultural history in institutions outside the county including the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Negotiations should be started to obtain copies of these recordings. There is a vast wealth of information on farming history still to be recorded through fieldwork. This should be considered as a matter of urgency as the people familiar with the objects and how they were used are mostly elderly. The need is particularly acute in Irish-speaking areas where terms and sayings relating to the objects are often not known to younger native speakers. We were able to collect some oral material in Gaoth Dobhair / Gweedore related to spadework and the use of sickles for harvest.
- **Display.** The level of interest in the county's agricultural past could be assessed by creating a temporary exhibition at the county museum or elsewhere. This kind of display would also lead to further offers of artifacts, some of which may be very important. The display should connect implements and farming systems to

the people who used them. The use of audio-visual archives would be crucial for its success.

- **Events.** Farm machinery on its own does not mean much to a lot of people. This becomes more apparent as farming declines in importance within Donegal. However, it has been found in other institutions that people who would be bored by a horse-operated machine displayed in a gallery would be enchanted by the sight of one working in a field. Living farm developments have such as Muckross Traditional Farms in County Kerry have shown the potential commercial viability of such operations. Vintage machinery rallies are organized in parts of east and north Donegal. These appeal to enthusiasts but this appeal could easily be broadened. Páirc Náisiúnta Ghleann Bheatha / Glenveagh National Park has made a tentative step towards keeping farm livestock (Figure 43). Live farm animals, especially young animals, are the single most popular feature of living farm museums. A strategy should be developed for temporary and permanent displays of Irish rare breeds and other breeds important in the history of the county. Again, developments such as Muckross Traditional Farms show the commercial potential of such enterprises.



Figure 43: Tamworth pigs in Páirc Náisiúnta Ghleann Bheatha / Glenveagh National Park

4.2. Fishing Heritage

- **Collection.** There is an urgent need for a collection strategy for fishing boats and especially for fishing equipment, including items used in poaching. If fishing equipment is identified as a priority, collection could begin without the necessity of greatly increased storage and conservation facilities. Consideration should be given to extending the definition of heritage objects to include distinctively local items such as modern lobster pots. The evocative names found on plastic fishing crates heaped around the county's piers should at least be recorded photographically.
- **Archival Research.** The National Library, National Museum (Turlough Park) and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum have significant photographic archives which include images related to sea fishing in Donegal. A strategy should be developed where copies of these images are acquired for a county archive, possibly as an extension of the current Donegal Local Studies collection in the County Library or in the Donegal County Archives.
- **Oral archives.** There is a significant amount of material relevant to Donegal's sea fishing heritage in institutions outside the county including the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and the Department of Irish Folklore in University College Dublin. Negotiations should be started to obtain copies of these recordings. There is a vast wealth of information on fishing still to be recorded through fieldwork. As with farming heritage, this should be considered as a matter of urgency as the people familiar with the objects and how they were used are mostly elderly. The need is particularly acute in Irish-speaking areas where terms and sayings relating to the objects are often not known to younger native speakers.

- **Display.** The level of interest in the county's fishing heritage could be assessed by creating a temporary exhibition at an agreed venue within the county. This kind of display would also lead to further offers of artifacts, some of which may be very important. The display should connect implements and fishing methods to the people who used them. The use of audio-visual archives would be crucial for its success.
- **Events.** Education staff at the National Museum (Turlough Park) organised the construction of a currach in the museum grounds some years ago. This worked well in raising public awareness of a unique heritage. The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum has organised demonstrations of making Boyne coracles and fly-tying. Within Donegal, Dónal Mac Polin has recently built a Dunfanaghy currach which is now on display in the Inishowen Maritime Museum, Greencastle. All of these activities show that, with imagination, institutions can bring the county's sea fishing heritage to life.

Appendix 1:

OBJECTS RELATED TO FARMING IN DONEGAL IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM, TURLOUGH PARK, COUNTY MAYO

ACCESSION NUMBER	OBJECT	LOCATION
F:1910.43	piggin	Gweedore, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1930.555	butterprint	Lisnagra, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1931.153	piggin	Tory Island, Tullaghobegly, Kilmacrenan, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1936.100	súgán twister	Carrick, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1936.101	súgán twister	Lifford, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1936.103	súgán twister	Carrick, Kilmacrenan, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1936.110	butterprint	Dunglow, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1941.275	harvest knot	Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1941.277	harvest knot	Killygordon, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1941.278	harvest knot	Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.135	spade	Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.138	loy	Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.139	loy	Glenties, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.140	loy	Ballybofey, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.294	fetter	Croveenananta, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.297	sieve	Croveenananta, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.300	flail	Crooveenanta, Cloghan, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.302	noggin	Reughra (near Ardaran), Killybegs Lower, Banagh, Co. Donegal, Ireland

F:1950.305	sieve	DerryConnor, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.315	plough	Mass Beg, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.318	horseshoe	Lifford, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.319	horseshoe	Lifford, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.345	flax sample	Lifford, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.346	flax sample	Lifford, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.347	flax sample	Lifford, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.348	flax sample	Lifford, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.349	flax sample	Lifford, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.350	flax sample	Lifford, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.351	flax sample	Lifford, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.352	flax sample	Lifford, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1950.419	harvest knot	Galwolie, Killteeroge, Co. Donegal, Ireland (O.S. 67, 68)
F:1950.420	harvest knot	Galwolie, Killteeroge, Co. Donegal, Ireland (O.S. 67, 68)
F:1950.421	harvest knot	Galwolie, Killteeroge, Co. Donegal, Ireland (O.S. 67, 68)
F:1951.3	churn	Stranorlar, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1953.29	potato planter	Teelin, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1953.30	potato planter	Teelin, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1954.68	nest	Tievecloghoge, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1956.126	sower	Gortcally, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1959.33	cow's leg	Dooey, Co. Donegal, Ireland

F:1959.35	butterprint	Dooey, Lettermacaward, Boylagh, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1959.36	butterprint	Dooey, Lettermacaward, Boylagh, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1959.41	butterprint	Dooey, Lettermacaward, Boylagh, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1959.55	fleames	Ardara, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1959.58	butterprint	Meenacarn, Lettermacaward, Boylagh, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1960.46	butterprint	Dooey, Lettermacaward, Boylagh, Co. Donegal, Ireland (O.S. 57, 65)
F:1963.192	slane	Ballyshannon Area, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1963.52	súgán	Cruit, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1964.221	harvest knot	Castlefinn, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1965.1203	rake	Ballybofey, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1968.168a	straddle	Glaskeeragh, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1968.169	harvest knot	Upper Selacis, Mountcharles, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1968.217	shears	Meenataggart, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1968.219	trap	Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1969.417	beehive	Garvanagh, Kilbarron, Tirhugh, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1970.109	slane	Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1974.102	creel	Heneys, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1995.310	butterprint	Glencolmcille, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1995.326	butterprint	Glencolmcille, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1997.578	halter (animal)	Crolly, Co. Donegal, Ireland

F:1999.214	bridle-bit	Inishowen Island, Inishkeel, Boylagh, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:2000.156	noggin	Donegal District, Donegal, Tirhugh, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:2000.167	piggin	(Near) Donegal, Co. Donegal, Ireland

Appendix 2:

OBJECTS RELATED TO FISHING IN DONEGAL IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM, TURLOUGH PARK, COUNTY MAYO

ACCESSION NUMBER	OBJECT	LOCATION
F:1931.117	currach	Tory Island, Tullaghobegly, Kilmacrenan, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1931.55	paddle	Termon, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1932.126	currach	Downings, Sheephaven, Donegal, Ireland
	boat	
F:1936.96	reel	Carrick, Lifford District, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1943.280	spear	Loughros More Bay, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1956.193	spear	Mountcharles District, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1959.42	fishing line	Dooey, Lettermacaward, Co. Donegal, Ireland
F:1995.303	model	Co. Donegal, Ireland
	boat model	
F:2003.707a-d	oar	Co. Donegal, Ireland
	model oar	
F1999:351	currach	Sheephaven, Co. Donegal
F2004.1331	paddling currach	Owey Island, Co. Donegal

Appendix 3:

FARMING ARTIFACTS FROM DONEGAL IN THE ULSTER FOLK & TRANSPORT MUSEUM, CULTRA, COUNTY DOWN

OBJECT	DONOR	LOCATION	BACKGROUND INFORMATION	ACCESSION NUMBER
Straw horse collar	Mick and John McHugh	Hornhead	Made for the museum. Taped interview R81.115	Acc. No: 262.1982
Donkey straddle	Mick and John McHugh	Hornhead	Made for the museum. Taped interview R81.115	Acc. No: 244.1981
Letterkenny spring spade no.1	X	Made by Stevensons of Coalisland		Acc. No: 48.1967
Letterkenny spring spade no.1	X	Made by Stevensons of Coalisland		Acc. No: 49.1967
Letterkenny spring spade No.2	X	Made by Stevensons of Coalisland		Acc. No: 64.1967
Letterkenny spring spade No.2	X	Made by Fishers of Newry		
Metal blade edge for two-shouldered wooden spade	Mr. C. Lyons	Cashel, Kilcar		Acc. No: 288.1967
Wooden drill plough	X	Used in Inishowen	Adjustable mould boards	

Appendix 4:

**FISHING ARTIFACTS FROM DONEGAL IN THE
ULSTER FOLK & TRANSPORT MUSEUM, CULTRA, COUNTY DOWN**

OBJECT	DONOR	LOCATION	BACKGROUND INFORMATION	ACCESSION NUMBER
Bait fork	Mr. Valentine Robinson	Dunfanaghy	3-pronged, for lug worm	
Drontheim		Port Ronan	Built by James McDonald, Moville. Moved to Inishowen Maritime Museum Greencastle in 1985	
Rowing currach	X	Downings	Made for museum in 1960s	
Paddling currach	X	Bunbeg		
Racing currach	X	Gola		

Appendix 5:

TAPED INTERVIEWS RELATING TO DONEGAL FARMING & FISHING IN THE ULSTER FOLK & TRANSPORT MUSEUM ARCHIVE, CULTRA, COUNTY DOWN

TAPE NUMBER	PERSON RECORDED	LOCATION	SUBJECT MATTER
R79.34	Nellie Doohan	Derryreel	Farming
R79.35	Cormac and Taig McFadden	Roshin	Farming and hiring fairs
R79.36	Mick McHugh	Horn Head	Farming, hunting and fishing
R79.36	Patrick Brogan	Horn Head	Farming
R79.37	George Haye	Creeslough	Doe Cope
R79.37	Brian McGinley	Creeslough	Doe Cope
R79.38	Harry (the Tailor) Alcorn	Horn Head	Dunfanaghy
R79.38	William Mulligan	Dunfanaghy	Turf and turbery
R79.39	James and Jeannie Coll	Portnablagh	Local stories and poems
R79.40	Nellie Doohan	Derryreel	Farming and hiring fairs
R79.40	Harry (the Burn) Alcorn	Horn Head	Fishing
R79.41	Patrick Brogan	Horn Head	Farming
R79.41	Harry (the Tailor) Alcorn	Horn Head	Local stories
R79.42	William Durnien	Horn Head	Doe Cope
R79.53	James and Jeannie Coll	Portnablagh	Farming and fishing
R79.53	George Duleavy	Cloughaneely	Migrant work
R79.54	William Mulligan	Dunfanaghy	Landlords and markets
R79.55	John and Mick McHugh	Horn Head	Farming and fishing
R79.56	Bob Jack Robinson	Dunfanaghy	Currach making
R80.38	James Coll	Portnablagh	Harbours and fishing
R80.38	Cormac and Taig McFadden	Roshin	Farming and migrant work
R80.39	Cormac and Taig McFadden	Roshin	Farming and migrant work

R80.57	Agnes Finnegan	Portnablagh	Gentry and co-ops
R80.58			
R80.70	Patrick Brogan	Horn Head and Derryreel	Farming and landlord
R80.70	Hugh McGinley	Swillybrin	Horse fairs
R80.72	Agnes Finnegan	Portnablagh	Gentry and co-ops
R81.115	Mick McHugh	Horn Head	Hornhead farming families
R81.116	James and Jeannie Coll	Portnablagh	Migrant work and domestic service
R82.84	John and Mick McHugh	Horn Head	Farming and fishing
R83.63	Dennis Durnien	Horn Head	Farming
R84.1	William Durnien	Horn head	Doe Cope
R84.27	William Durnien	Horn Head	Doe Cope
R87.60	Hugh Paddy Ward	Keadue	Farming and migration
R87.61	Hugh Paddy Ward	Keadue	Farming and migration
R90.82	J Sweeney and E Gallagher	Bunbeg	Farming
R2000.99	Bríd Coll	Derrybeg	Hiring

Appendix 6:

DATABASE OF FARMING HERITAGE OBJECTS

Key to Condition:

V Good: Suitable for display or use

Good: Requires minor restoration/conservation work

Fair: Specimen largely complete but requires significant restoration/conservation work

Poor: Requires major restoration/conservation work

V Poor: Not suitable for display or use

[DATABASE INFORMATION AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST]

Appendix 7:

DATABASE OF FISHING HERITAGE OBJECTS

Key to Condition:

V Good: Suitable for display or use

Good: Requires minor restoration/conservation work

Fair: Specimen largely complete but requires significant restoration/conservation work

Poor: Requires major restoration/conservation work

V Poor: Not suitable for display or use

[DATABASE INFORMATION AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST]



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