

ANNUAL REPORT: INISHARK ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT 2017 FIELD SCHOOL

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Excavations of Building 57, a four room stone house constructed in the 1820's, on the western side of the village of Inishark, County Galway, Ireland

The 2017 excavations on Inishark were focused on the excavations of two units: A three room pre-famine 1820's stone building and a stone oratory and outdoor prayer station that dates to between the 8th and 11th centuries CE. The Cultural Landscapes of the Irish Coast (CLIC) project is broadly focused on understanding island life and economy at the time of the Irish Famines of the late 1840's as well as the spread of early Christianity to remote islands in the 8-11th centuries CE. The island of Inishark, located approximately 8 miles from the mainland of Connemara, County Galway provides a test case for understanding life along the remote margins of the mainland. First inhabited in the Bronze Age, and then as a focus of inhabitation during the Early Medieval period from the 8-11th centuries as well as 1780's to 1900 when over 300 people lived on Inishark, the last 25 people left the island in 1960. High cliffs define three sides of the island, with the other side having a small port and breakwater for boats. The post 1750 village on the southeast corner of the island is remarkably well preserved with extensive standing stone buildings and medieval ruins found in multiple locations.

To understand island life before and during the Irish famine, the CLIC team excavated Building 57, the western most stone building in the village. In the 1820's the village of Inishark was inhabited by 250 people, renting stone houses from the landlord who owned the island and all the buildings, as the tenants fished for cod, mackerel and herring, and grew plants to supplement seasonally available fish. To uncover the remains of building 57, the students remove the grass sod covering the partially destroyed stone walls of this four room building, and then slowly excavated the outside stone pathways, and areas inside of the building. Excavating inside project members identified multiple fire hearths, often with later hearths built on top of earlier hearths, as well as sub-floor drains, and collections of broken plates, cups, bowls and platters. Using a quad copter we were able to document the building from the air, and with a Total Station, to map the entire building. Two of the rooms were constructed in the 1820's,

with the other two rooms built in the 1860's and abandoned in the 1930's. Excavations in these rooms recovered representative broken plates, bowls, and bottles from these periods.

Members of the 2017 CLIC team also studied the spread of Early Medieval people across western Ireland. To facilitate this we excavated part of an Early Medieval ruin where we uncovered the remains of a 8-11th centuries CE stone oratory and the remains of two outdoor prayer stations called *Leachts*. The oratory was partially filled in with almost a meter of fill deposits, and in the loose fill deposits we uncovered the remains of several post 15th century broken pots and bottles. On the floor of the oratory we uncovered a preserved fire hearth that was placed right below three crosses carved in the preserved stonewall. A fourth cross was carved next to the entrance of the oratory, and illustrate the important role this oratory must have had with monks and pilgrims. Outside the oratory, we excavated the remains of two square *Leachts*, and several cross slabs found in primary context. The *Leachts* were square, about 50 cm high, and were built on top of stone lined cenotaphs defined by large upright stones.

Before beginning excavations students spent five days learning about archaeological field methods, participating in archaeological field trips on neighboring islands, and being briefed in the daily workings of an archaeological project and the linkages between the project research design, anthropological questions, and recovered heritage data. The students were involved in all aspects of the research, from excavation of cultural sediments, photography of architecture and building remains, recovery of cultural materials, bagging and tagging of objects, transporting the objects back from the field excavation to the temporary camp, and then assisting in the cleaning, drying, and preliminary laboratory analysis of the cultural remains on the neighboring island Inishbofin after the excavation was complete.

The results of these excavations will be shared through a range of publications, conference presentations, and student projects. The preliminary results of the excavations will be shared through conferences, including the Annual meetings of the Society for Historical Archaeology, the Society for American Archaeology, and the American Anthropological Association. The results will also be shared via publications, both regional Irish Journals as well as international research such as the journal *Antiquity*.