

## Harbourview: An Irish-Welsh networking initiative

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### Abstract

Historic harbours, as infrastructural elements, are neither buildings nor monuments thus typically fall between the remit of heritage designation. Yet they are critical to reading the human occupation of islands historically. Inevitably these routes and points of embarkation and disembarkation were pathways not just for goods, but also for knowledge, beliefs, and broader cultural understanding. The rising sea levels and increased storm activity generated by climate change are endangering the survival of this important coastal heritage on both sides of the Irish Sea.

Harbourview, a research alliance between Cardiff University (Wales) and University College Dublin (Ireland) funded by the ESRC and the IRC, is a networking project which aimed to establish new dialogues on the significance of these harbours and the means by which they can be documented and appropriately managed. Through a series of seminars, community workshops and a final symposium, researchers, relevant stakeholders in local and national governments, and local communities in Ireland and Wales participated in activities and discussions on how best to address this compelling coastal heritage. The Harbourview project established the potential of community documentation using newly accessible methods of 3D recording and visualization, and, in tandem with the seminar and final symposium, clarified the critical issues in achieving a comprehensive documentation of this invaluable heritage.

### Keywords

climate change, coastal heritage, community participation, digital survey techniques

### Aims and objectives of Harbourview

The interlinked maritime histories of Ireland and Wales were described as part of an ‘Irish Sea Province’ trade network postulated by archaeologists in the late 1960’s (Moore 1970) and echoed more recently in a publication on Cornish maritime history (Payton et al. 2014). Trade routes extended from Europe to the Irish Sea, but the coasting traffic between Ireland and the UK was particularly intense and extended to the modern period (Graham and Gordon 1985). This network enabled a knowledge and cultural exchange that would have impacted the form of harbours and harbour communities on both sides of the Irish Sea. A collation of small pier and quay structures along the Irish coast (excluding Northern Ireland) as part of Harbourview has estimated that there

are upwards of 1000 of these structures, including many pre-1800 structures built by estates or local communities, which is likely mirrored along the Welsh coastline. This coastal heritage is increasingly topical because of increased storm activity and rising sea levels due to climate change, a threat to both natural and built heritage. Given this imminent threat to coastal heritage the need for comprehensive documentation is pressing, yet beyond the scope of any single research team.

The ambition of this Irish-Welsh network was to raise awareness of the importance of harbours as coastal heritage, which need to be studied as interlinked systems to understand the shared heritage of Wales and Ireland, and the importance of their robust documentation in face of growing environmental threats. To achieve this, we brought together academics with public policy makers, such as the Irish Heritage Council and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of

Wales (RCAHMW), local county council officials, local historians, and communities for a series of seminars, workshops, and a final symposium. The objective was twofold: to encourage future interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research, and to generate community participation in the documentation of harbours using accessible technologies such as photogrammetry. The intended start date of October 2020 was delayed until June 2021, when Covid-19 restrictions were sufficiently open to allow for cross-border travel, with the end date extended to August 2022.

## Networking activities

Raising awareness among relevant stakeholders as to the imminent threats facing coastal heritage was the most significant impact this networking could have in an effort to build connections and develop more coordinated strategies for the documentation and repurposing of this coastal heritage. Several vehicles were used to engage with different stakeholders, starting with the project website (Fig. 1), made available in three working languages; English, Welsh, and Gaelic, to reach the broadest audience. The website offered an information portal for a set of harbours surveyed in summer of 2021, with locations and histories illustrated on an interactive Story Map (Fig. 2) to introduce the variety of harbours along

both coastlines. Visitors to the Story Map were invited to share stories or images on the landing page for the map, though in practice no one did, possibly due to the need to download a form to complete and return, which may have made the process too cumbersome.

More successful was use of the website for the community-based workshops on accessible survey and modelling techniques. The ambition was to generate further interest from other local communities to document and share their own cultural heritage, thus addressing the need for rapid documentation. The greatest advocates for the recognition of local harbours as significant cultural heritage are these local communities, who share associations with their harbour that span multiple generations. Drawing on the enthusiasm of this cohort to help document these historically important structures held great promise.

Four harbours were chosen based on the preliminary surveys, identified as being representative of locally constructed harbours (Ballydehob, County Cork, Ireland and Newport Parrog, Pembrokeshire, Wales), industry-built structures common in Wales (Porthgain, Pembrokeshire) or the government-built harbours more familiar in Ireland (Gyles Quay, County Louth). Contact was made with local community groups to encourage participation and point to the website registration portal. Of the four workshops there were two that proved particularly successful in fostering community engagement - Ballydehob and Newport Parrog.

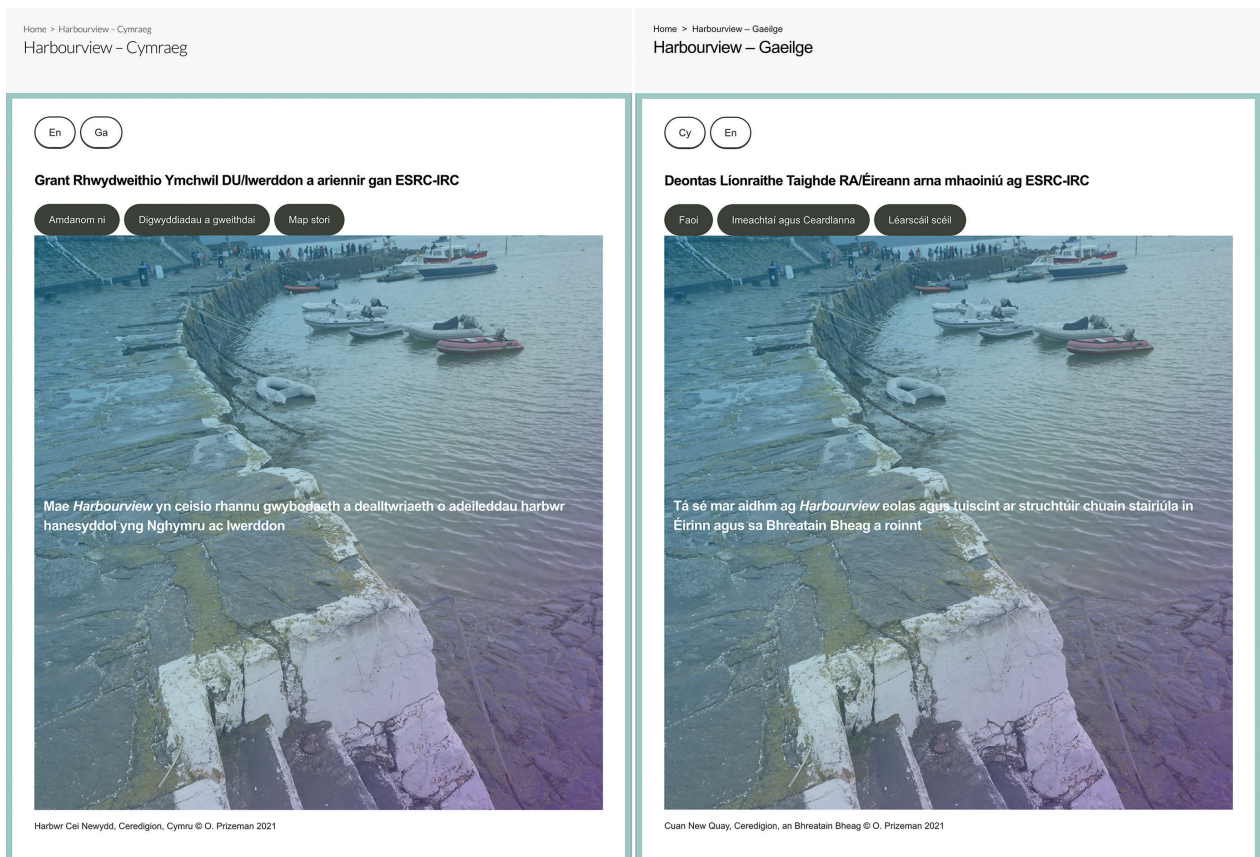
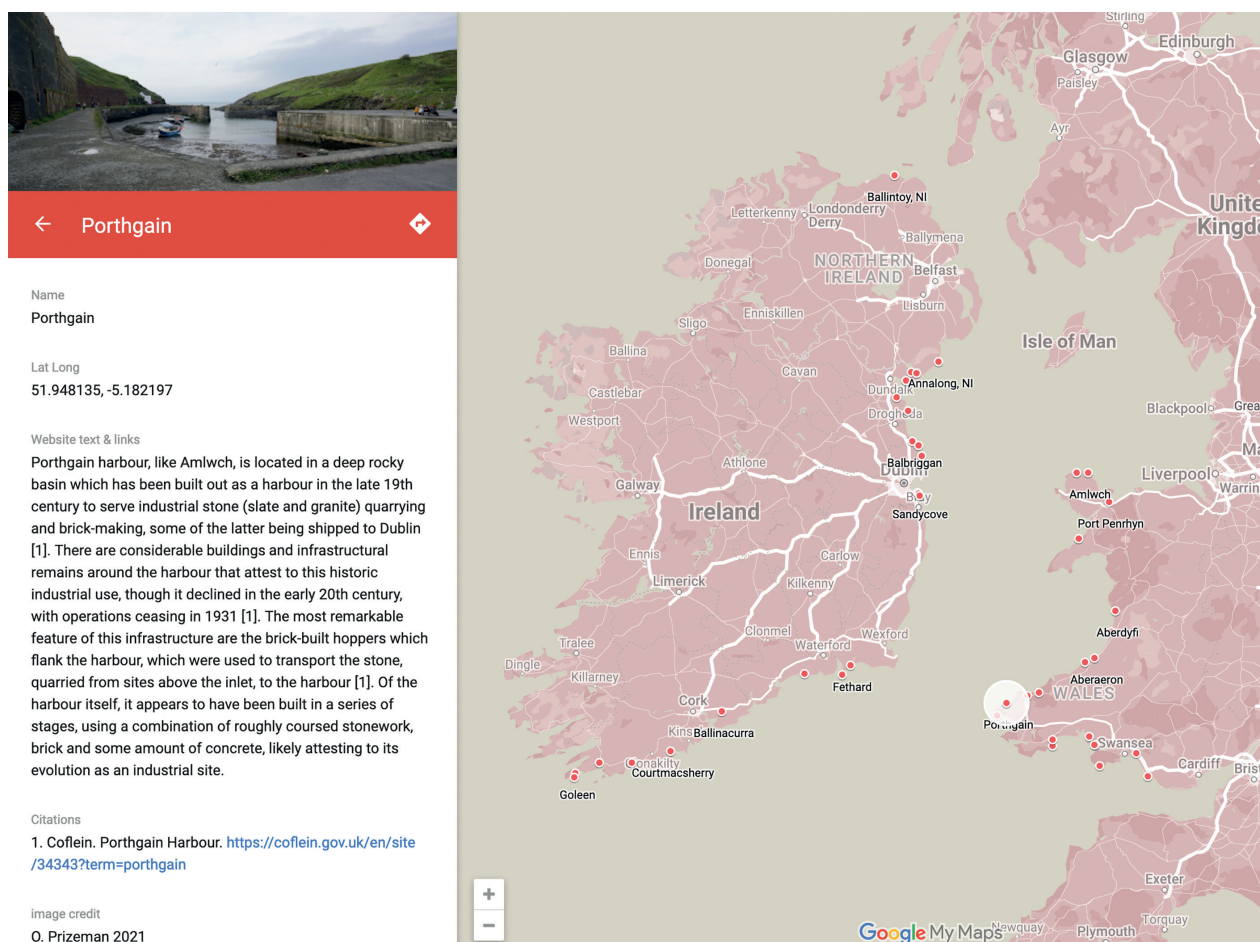


Figure 1. Harbourview website in Welsh and Gaelic (and English) (<http://www.historicharboursofirelandandwales.com>)



**Figure 2.** Harbourview Story Map (<https://www.historicharboursofirelandandwales.com/historic-harbours-story-map/>)

We had been aware that the momentum gathered at these workshops might prove insufficient to sustain and seed this activity to further community groups, and that the quality or quantity of imagery might prove insufficient to achieve the intended objectives for the case studies. But, as this project was a scoping study, any shortcomings would help to inform future collaborative research proposals. What we discovered was that it was critical to find a central person in the community, such as a local historian, to provide leadership for the group in their documentation efforts, as happened in Ballydehob and Newport Parrog, without which the community failed to coalesce. Additionally, the structure of the workshops needs to be more adaptive to the interests and skills of each community. In Ballydehob the community included artists, photographers, surveyors, and archaeologists, with documentation on multiple fronts, including 3D digital models from drone surveys, illustrative histories in drawings, and formal photography. While at Newport Parrog, a 3D model built from photographs from hand-held cameras was complemented by a set of historic photos documenting the history of the quays. On the remaining workshops the researchers undertook the digital surveys; a terrestrial and drone-based survey at Porthgain in Wales and a photographic survey at Gyles Quay in Ireland. The

documentation from the four workshops held were used to generate 3D digital representations of the harbours (Fig. 3), which formed the basis of a limited comparative analysis of Irish and Welsh harbour structures.

An online cross-border seminar was held in the autumn of 2021, with academic researchers, policy makers from the Heritage Council and the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) from Ireland and the RCAHMW in Wales, local historians, and community members, which was intended to raise awareness of the threat to coastal heritage and to identify the key issues. Stemming from this discussion were a set of clearly articulated recommendations regarding the need for a systematic programme for documentation that would include comprehensive inventories, with risk registers derived from these, a clearer categorization of harbour structures on national databases, and protocols on management. The final symposium, held in Dublin in April 2022, sought to address these themes with lectures from researchers, national bodies and conservation engineers in addition to sharing the results of the community surveys from the communities of Ballydehob and Newport Parrog (<https://www.historicharboursofirelandandwales.com/events-and-workshops/>). A keynote address was also given by Dr Linde Egberts on the need to develop alternative strategies to the convention of preservation of coastal heritage.



**Figure 3.** Models from drone photogrammetry. Above: Porthgain, Wales (Prizeman and Barazzetti, 2022). Below: Ballydehob, Ireland (O'Donoghue and Vaughan, 2022)

## Outputs and impacts

The final symposium, which was a hybrid in-person and on-line event, garnered considerable interest from local county officials primarily responsible for the management of these small piers and quays, raising awareness of the significance and vulnerability of this coastal heritage. The results from the network exchanges and this symposium will be shared with a wider audience in a final edited book. The ambition is to extend the discussion among researchers, government officials, local historians, and communities with a view to engendering further research and illustrating how local communities can document their own coastal heritage.

Given the limited number of workshops held, assessing the potential impact on the communities can only be provisional. In Newport Parrog, Ballydehob, and Gyles Quay, the workshops served to bring the communities together to share memories and insights into their maritime history, supporting a better understanding of the significance of their coastal heritage. This was particularly evident in Ballydehob where the local historian, Cormac Levis, commented that while the shipping and commercial history had been previously documented, the Harbourview project served to highlight the importance of the quays and warehouses that had supported this local economy, which had been overlooked by both the com-

munity, the local council, and the NIAH. The workshop served to capture the imagination of the community and encouraged them to take on the responsibility of not only documenting their coastal heritage but to advocate for its recognition on the NIAH and as part of the Architectural Conservation Area designated by the local council. As part of this effort the community intends to publish a book on Ballydehob Quay and its satellite quays, which will share both the social history and the documentation undertaken as part of the Harbourview project.

The intended outcomes of the Harbourview project had been, in part, to encourage local communities to take an active role in documenting and advocating for recognition of their coastal heritage. Following the symposium, Heritage Officers in County Mayo and County Louth in Ireland approached the project team regarding the documentation of local piers under their management. In the case of County Mayo, the community of

Belmullet had been collaborating with the County Council to preserve their local pier and requested training on appropriate documentation techniques. In County Louth, the Heritage Officer contacted the project team to follow-up on the Gyles Quay documentation, indicating that a local community group was interested in the results. This work is currently in preparation as a paper on the construction of Gyles Quay, the first concrete pier built by the Irish Office of Public Works, for the *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society*. These will be managed under the current project framework, while further funding will be sought in Ireland to continue the community workshops with other County Councils and local communities. In Wales the RCAHMW are intending to review the current challenges in recording this coastal heritage and evaluate the opportunities afforded by advances in survey technology raised by the Harbourview project.

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