PORT OF THE PROMONTORY

PORTRUSH HERITAGE GROUP

Excavation at Antrim Gardens in 2005 by Northern Archaeological Consultancy showing archaeological deposits. Courtesy of Northern Archaeological Consultancy.

Portrush, historically, had many different names such as *Portros*, *Portrossce* and *Portrosse*. The name Portrush comes from Port Rois [port rush] *'port of the promontory'*. The headland that looks out across the Atlantic Ocean is called Ramore, which is derived from *'Rathmore'*, meaning Great Fort.

During Medieval times Portrush was an important landing place. In 1306 a church is listed in the Papal Taxation Record as Eccia de Portrossce.

Archaeological excavations in Antrim Gardens in 2005 produced evidence of a substantial settlement dating to the 13th and 14th centuries. The archaeologists uncovered many different features including foundations and a well. Indications that Portrush was thriving at this time included the many pieces of pottery uncovered, including pottery that was imported from Bristol and France.

The Antrim Gardens (Portrush) excavations produced a sherd of Roman Samian pottery, dating to the 1st or 2nd century AD. During the Medieval period sherds of Samian pottery were probably brought here as 'holy' relics.

Detail taken from a later reproduction copy of the 1580 Calendar State Paper Map showing the outer wall of the fort located overlooking the harbour. Courtesy of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council.


CLOSE-UP OF DETAIL

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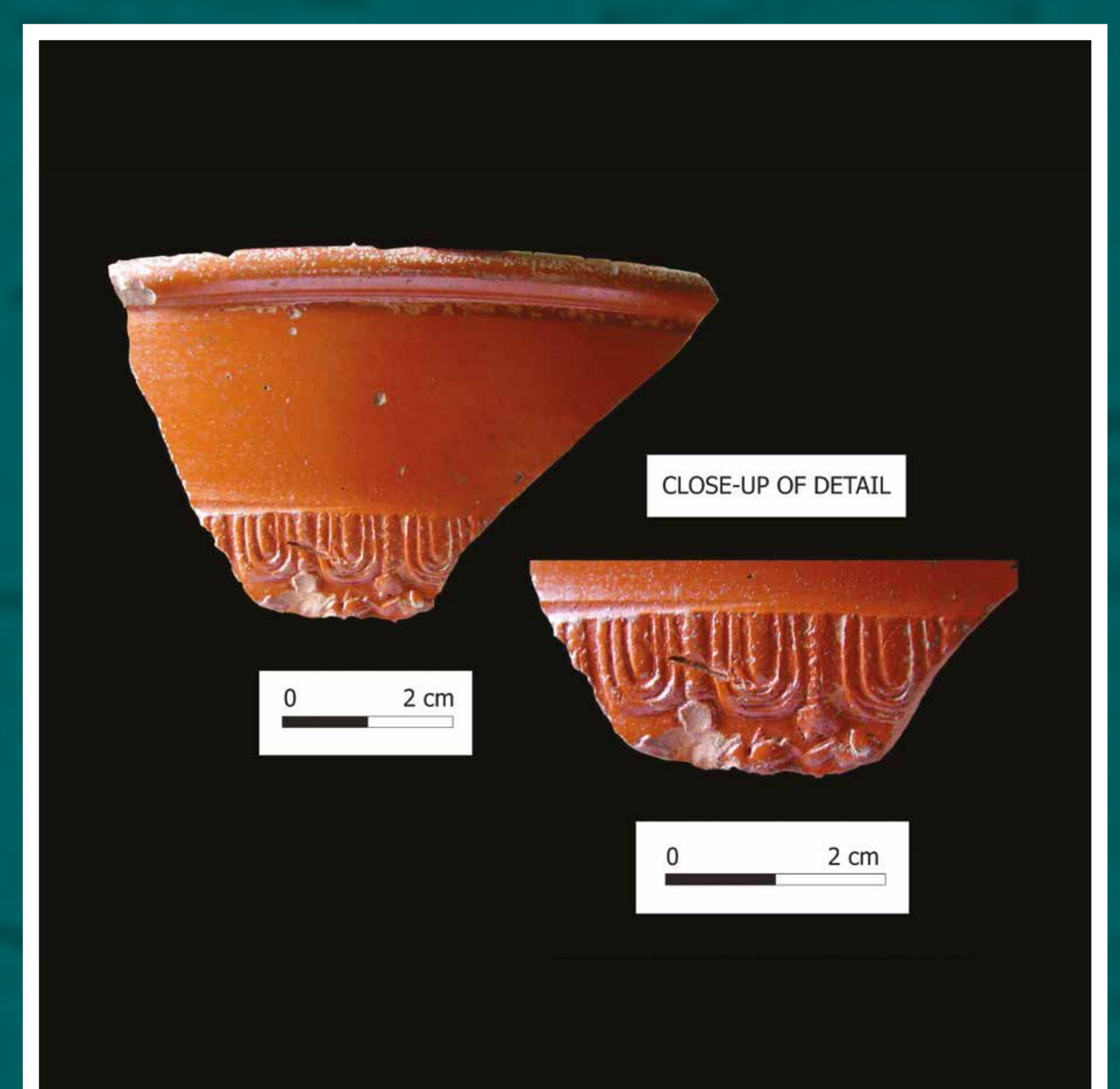
The fragment of Samian Ware recovered from the excavation at Antrim Gardens. Roman tableware pottery dating from the 1st to 3rd Century AD. Courtesy of Northern Archaeological Consultancy.

## Antrim Gardens Discovery Project

The Portrush Heritage Group Peace IV Project is inspired by the geophysical survey that was undertaken by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, Queen's University in 2018 as part of the Peace IV programme.

THE FORT OF PORTRUSH

PORTRUSH HERITAGE GROUP
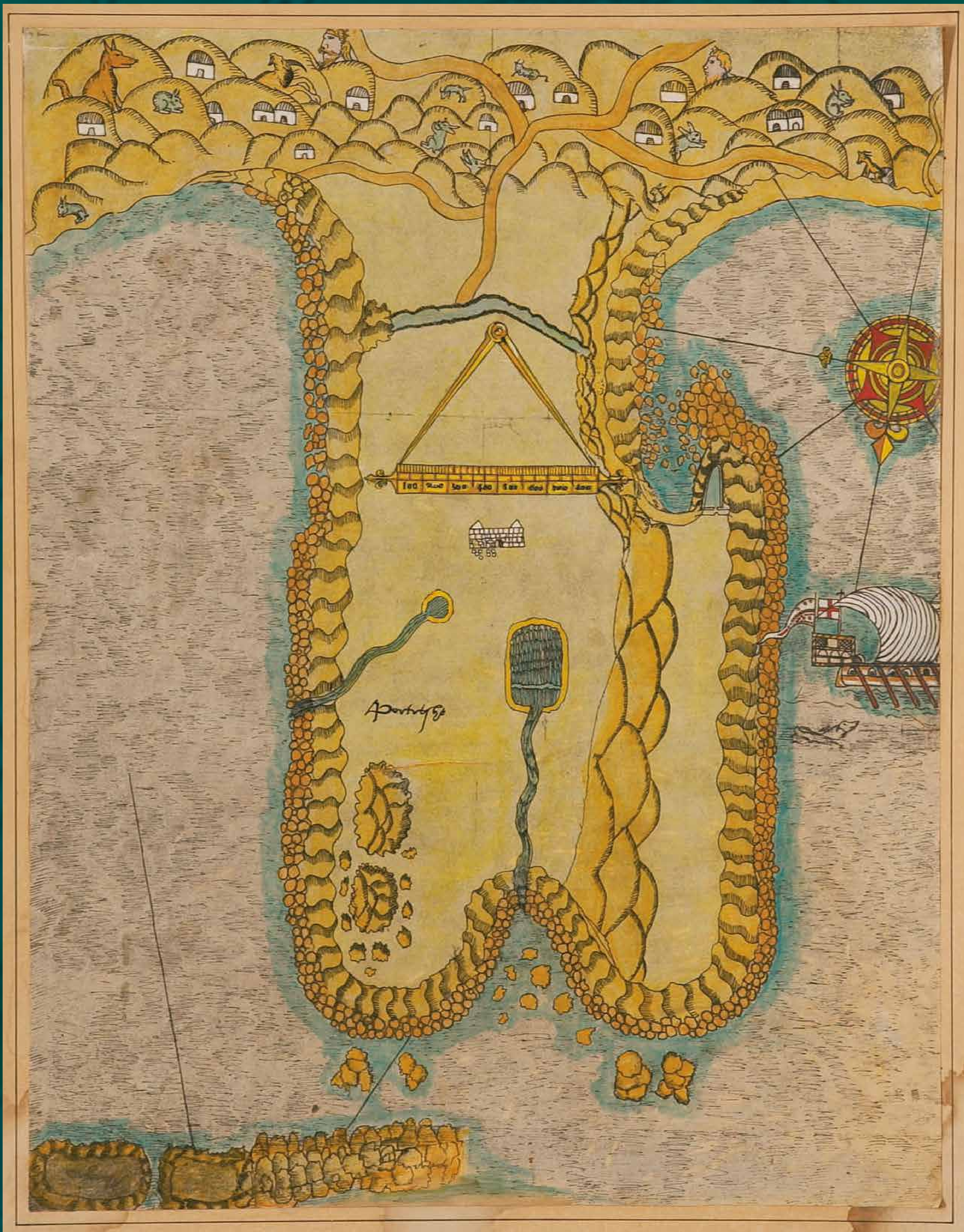
Colourised reproduction of the 1580 map of the peninsula of Portrush.

The shoreline along the North Coast retains many castles that were dotted along an important maritime route. Portrush has been an important landing place since Anglo-Norman times and continued to be used by trading and fishing vessels in the following centuries. "Porto Rosso" is named on a Portolan map created in Venice in 1468 which helped to guide merchant ships around our rocky coast.
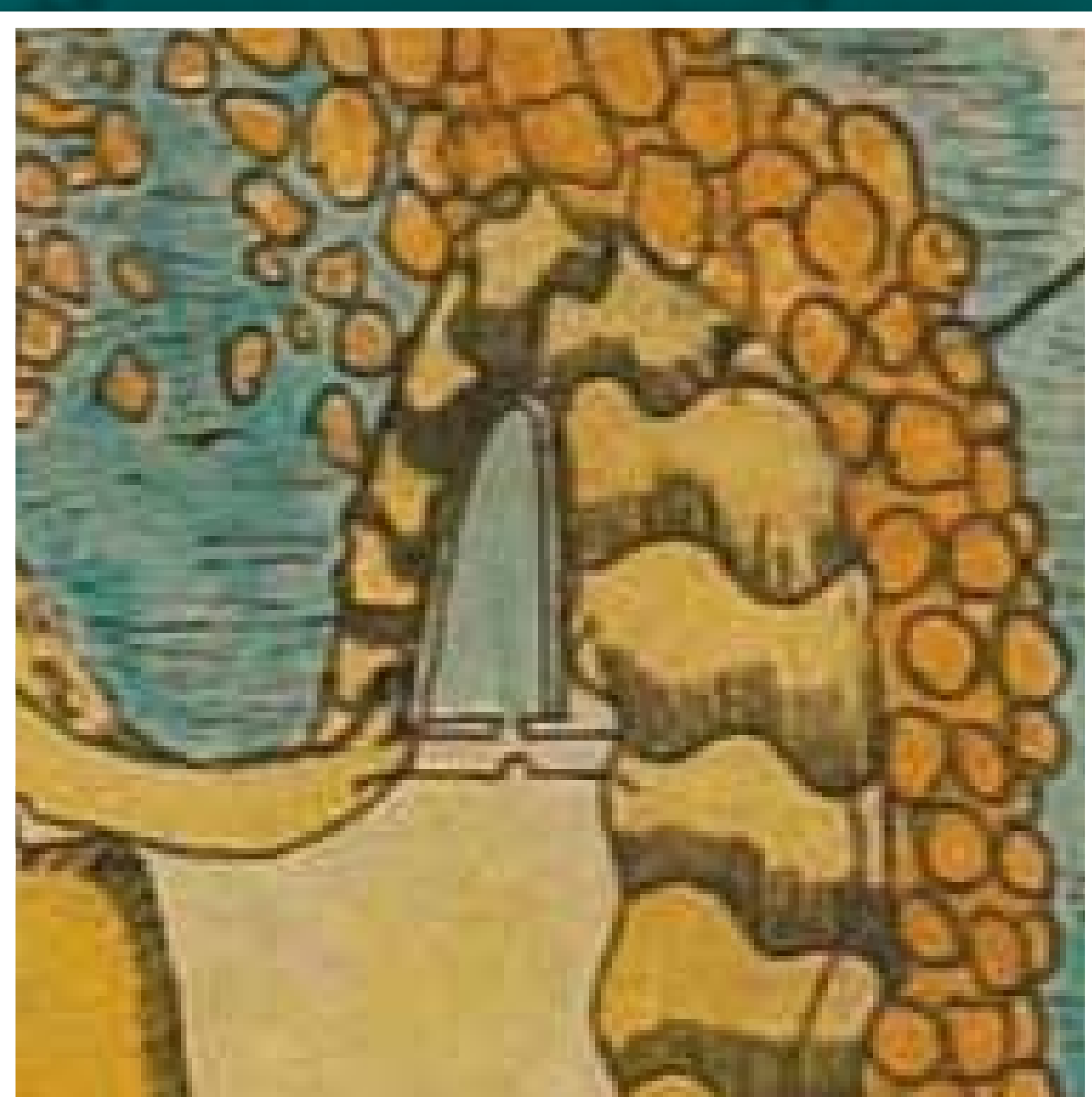
Detail showing the fort of Portrush with outer wall and entrance.

The 16th century map of Portrush depicts an enclosed area on top of a hill overlooking a natural harbour on the west side of the promontory. This hill was known as Crannagh Hill. The earliest written evidence for the fort of Portrush comes from the Lord Deputy Perrot, writing from Dunluce in 1584: "I have taken Dunferte, the ward being fled; likewise another pyle by Portrush". Dunferte is now called Ballyreagh and lies to the south-west of Ramore headland.

In 1606, Sir Thomas Phillips writes in a letter to Lord Salisbury "under the fort itself there might be made a good harbour".

The natural harbour was adapted for use and the footprint of it can still be seen today in the area known as the Old Dock. It is a fine surviving element of the earlier harbour and today it is protected as a scheduled area.

In the 19th century the harbour was extended and developed to accommodate larger maritime vessels and Crannagh Hill was quarried out to supply the stone needed for the new harbour. With the salmon trade in the 19th century large fleets of smacks called into Portrush to restock for ice to maintain their precious cargo.

Antrim Gardens Discovery Project

MARITIME TRADITION
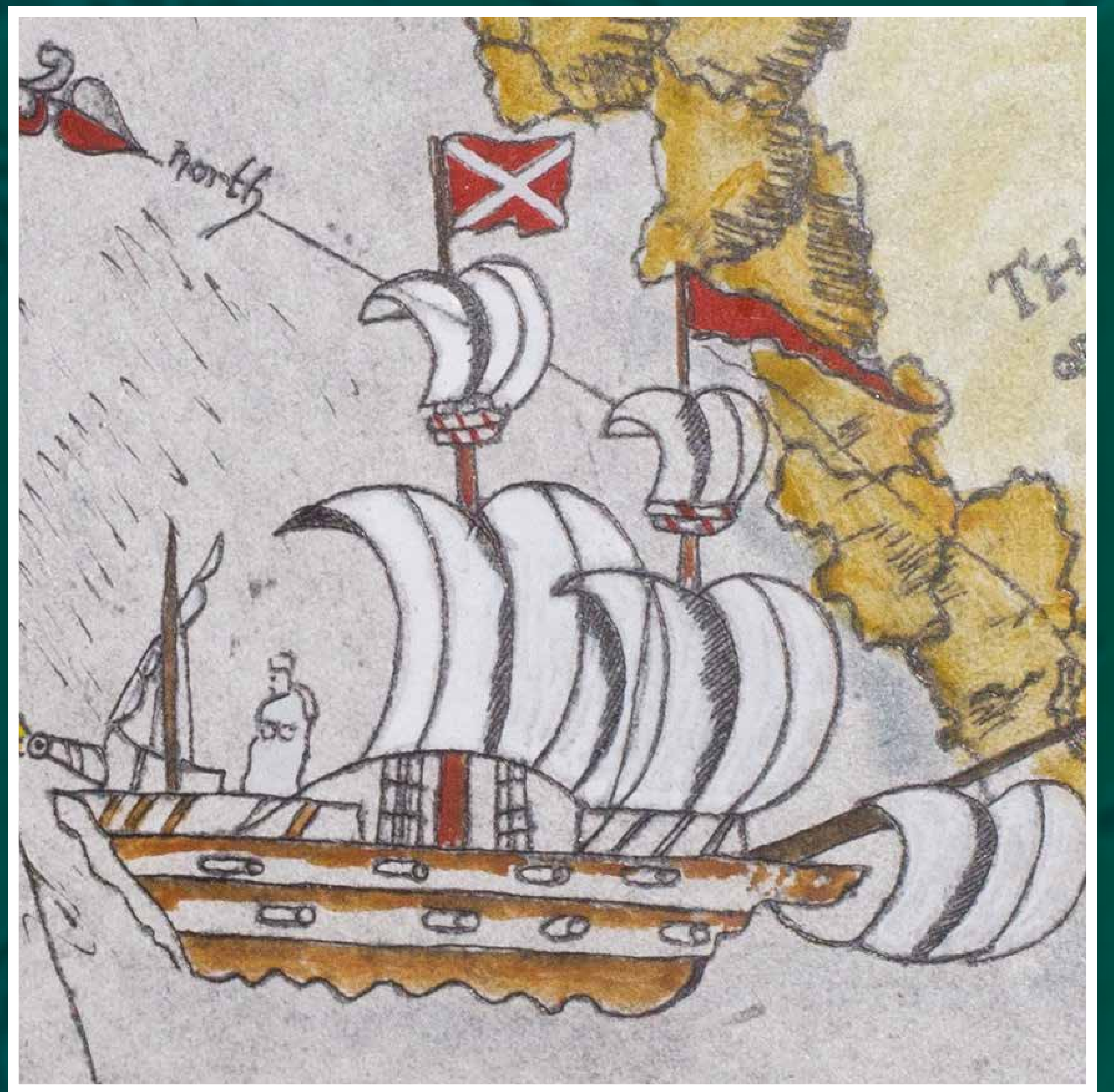
Close up image taken from the 1580 map of the North Coast of Antrim. Courtesy of Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council.

The North Coast has witnessed many visiting seafarers. A great number of Viking hoards have been found on the Antrim coast. In 1813, a Viking burial was uncovered in Ballywillan townland, on the outskirts of Portrush.

A newspaper article records the finding of a clinker-built boat "in a mound c.40ft in diameter, composed of stones and clay...about 15 perches from the shore of the bog...it is over 6 or 8 feet in height". Finds from the mound and boat included bones and silver coins. The boat had no nails and was put together with pegs of wood. The *Ordnance Survey Memoirs* also record the keel of a ship found in Ballywillan bog.
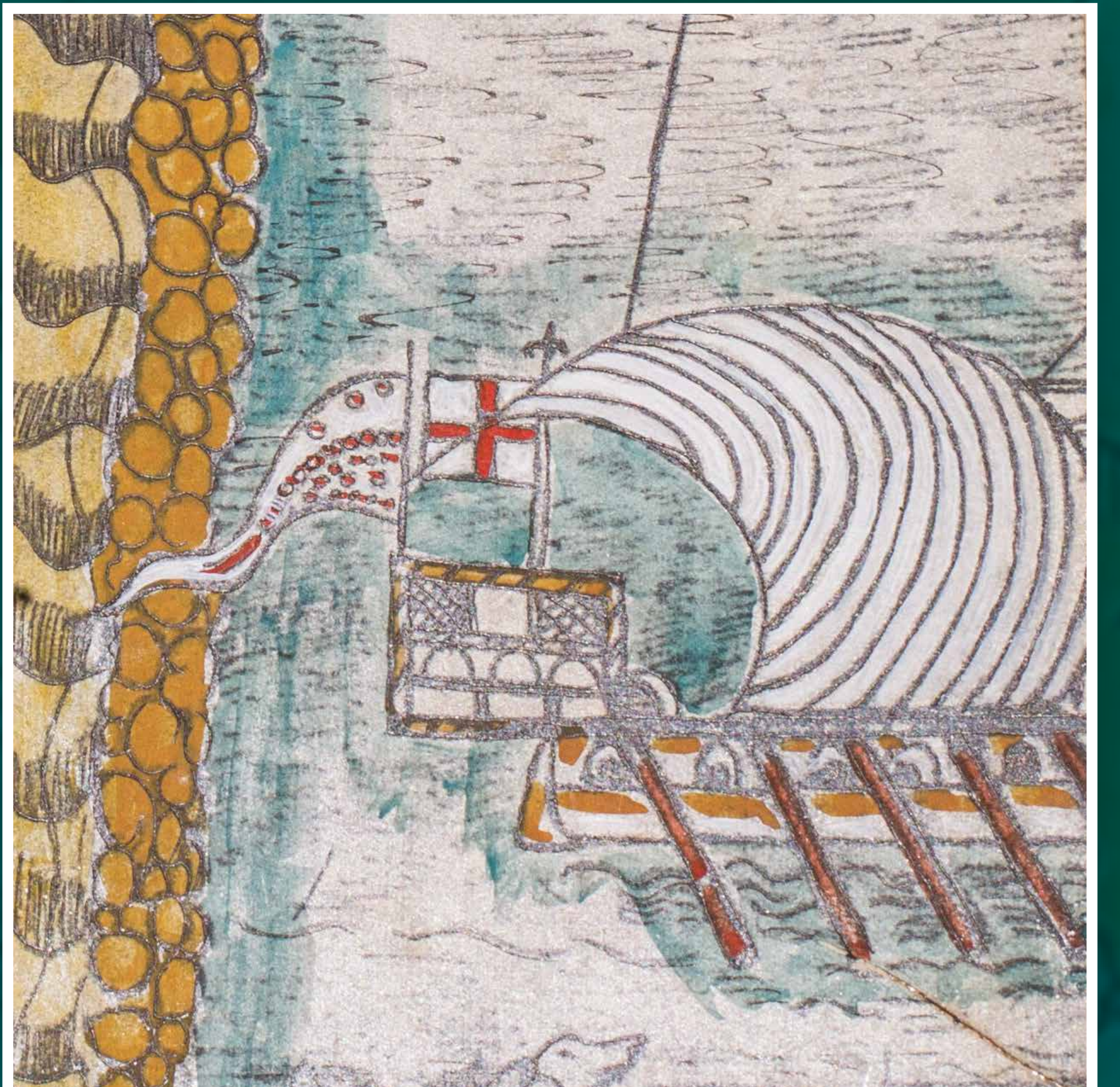
Detail from the 1580 map of the peninsula of Portrush. The ship has sail and oar capability. Gun ports are also visible. Flying the Cross of St. George flag. Courtesy of Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council.

Viking Influence

The Drontheim boat was the traditional wooden boat for the north and west coastal areas of Ireland and Scotland. It is a double ended clinker built boat whose origin stretch back in time to the Viking influence.

Boat building was part of the town's history. The James Kelly boatyard in Portrush produced many fine examples of the Drontheim. Other well-known Portrush boat builders include master boat builders John Hopkins and William Gregg.

Traditional Drontheim under sail off the North Coast of Antrim. Image courtesy of Robin Ruddock, Drontheim and Yawl Society.

Antrim Gardens Discovery Project

MARITIME TRADE

Colourised reproduction of the 1580 map of the North Coast of Antrim from the Calendar State Papers. Courtesy of Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council.

The excavations in Antrim Gardens uncovered many different artefacts associated with fishing, such as iron hooks and net weights. During the 14th century records show that Portrush did a healthy trade in fish with the Isles and with western Scotland.
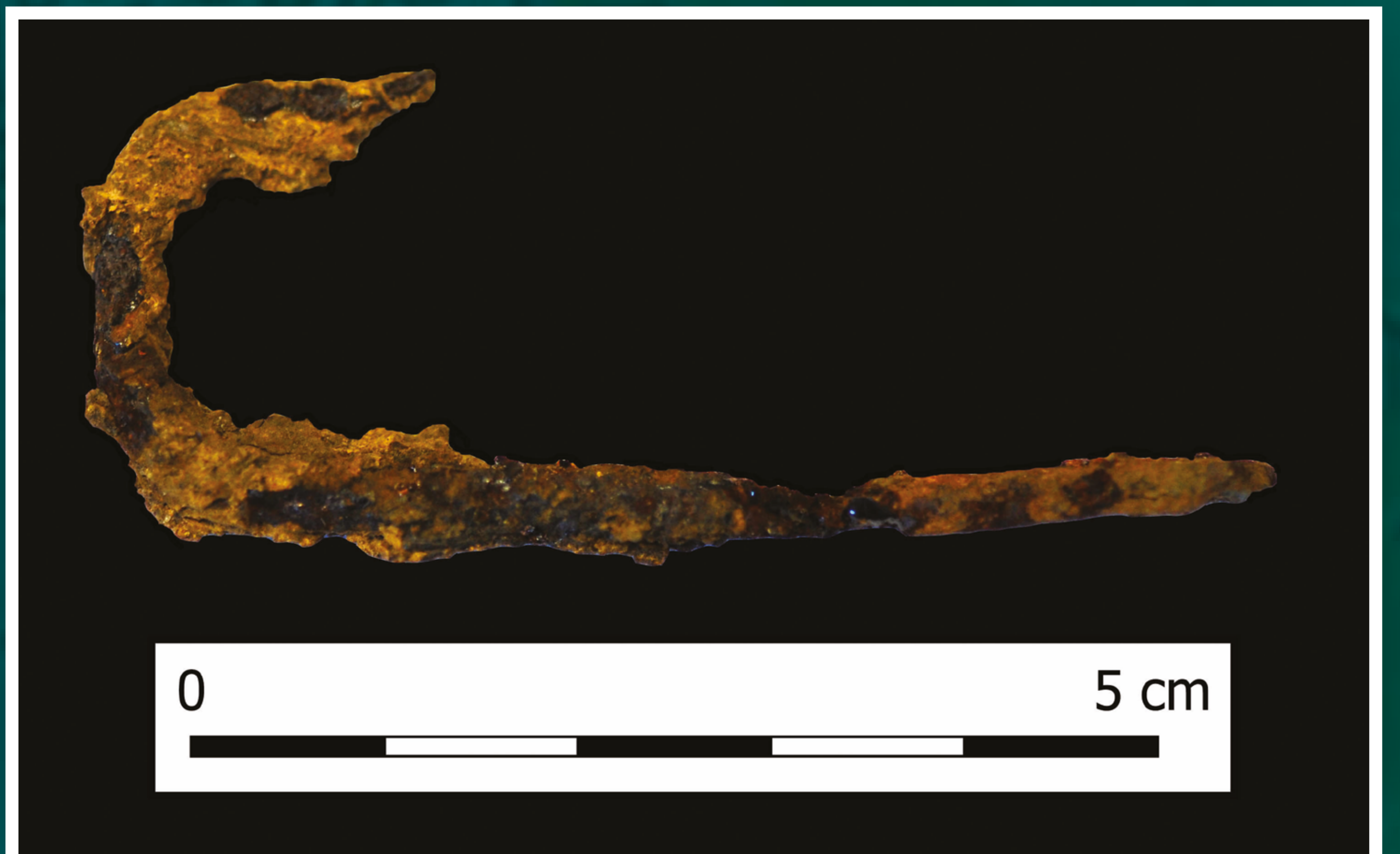
The 16th century map depicts the north coast in detail along with the Scottish coast and Isles. Sir Thomas Phillips remarked that the fishing was good at Portrush and that this was known to Breton fishermen who came to fish for dogfish and rays. The fish was then preserved and salted for exported as far away as Spain.

The map depicts sea going vessels in fantastic detail. Look closely and you can see sailors standing on deck.

In 1630, a salmon fishing station is recorded at Portrush which was part of a thriving network of salmon fisheries along the north coast. The salmon trade continued into the 19th century with many ships calling into Portrush to restock for ice.

Iron fishing hook recovered during the 2005 excavation at Antrim Gardens. Courtesy of Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council.
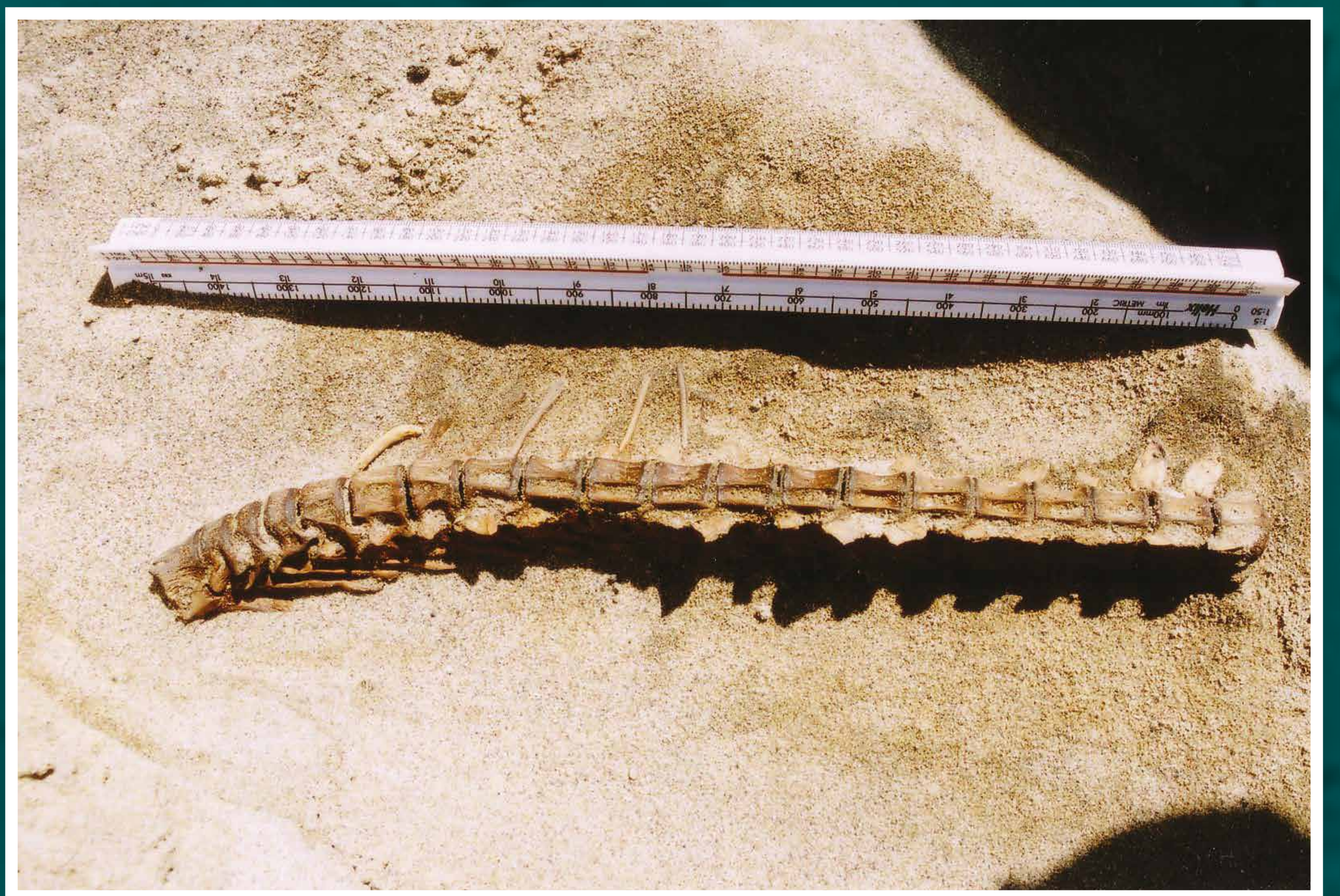
Fish bones uncovered during the excavation at Antrim Gardens. Courtesy of Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council.

A large fleet of smacks carried salmon from Ballina and Ballyshannon finally ending up in Liverpool. There was a five pound prize for the first vessel to reach Liverpool which was generally won by a smack called the *Benbulbin Hawk*, which was manned by a Portrush crew.

With the arrival of steam passenger ships, Portrush was crowned as the Queen of Watering Places, with day trippers and seasonal workers lining the quay as they travelled back and forth across the water.

Antrim Gardens Discovery Project