

In the Wake of Colmcille...

...and beyond

Some personal recollections



John Logan



Sculpture of Saint Columba
(Colmcille) in St Columba's Park,

Early History of the Currach Colmcille

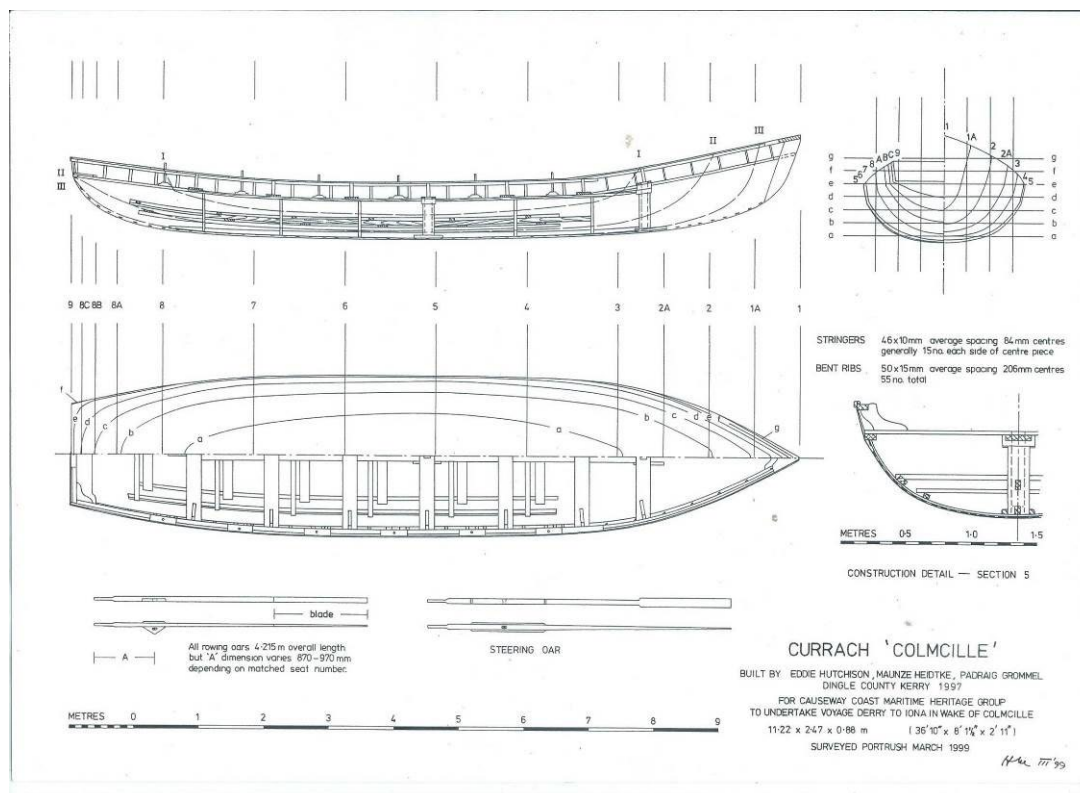
1997 - In the Wake of Colmcille

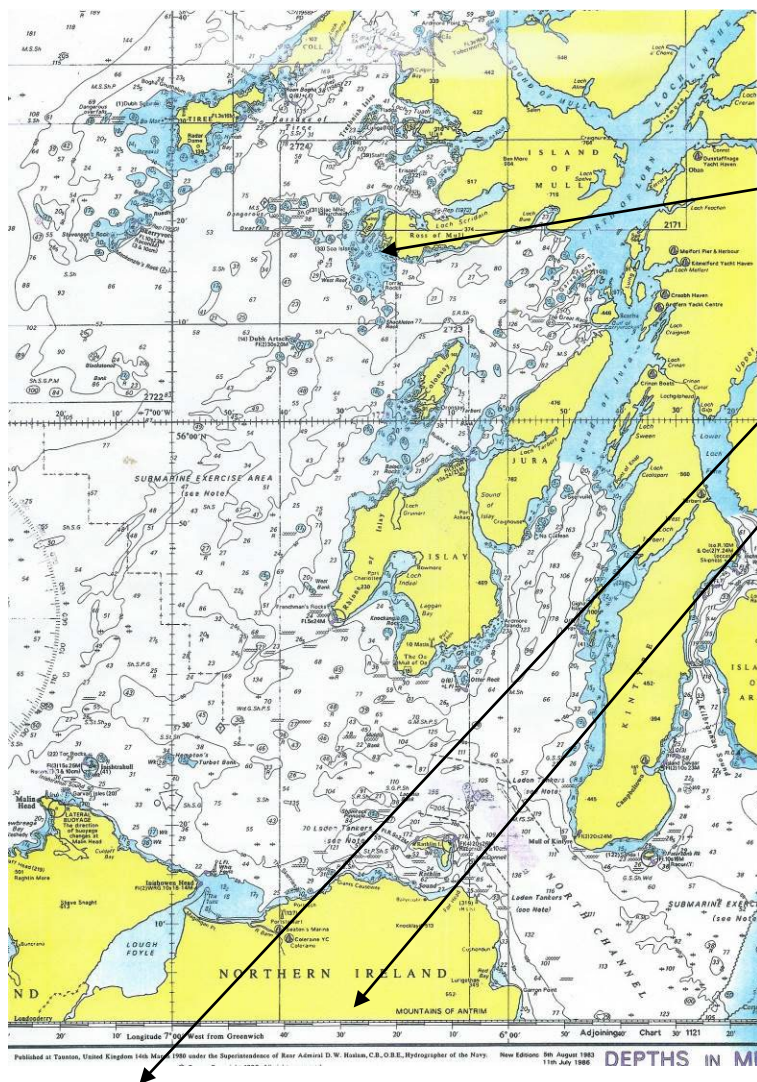
The Colmcille project was conceived during the Portrush Traditional Boat Rally of September 1996 when Robin Ruddock shared his vision of how the 1400th anniversary of St. Colmcille's death might be commemorated in a unique way. The vision, which involved retracing the seafaring Saint's **epic voyage by curragh to Iona**, was shared by a sufficient number of interested members of the Causeway Coast Maritime Heritage Group to enable planning of the first Colmcille expedition.

The curragh Colmcille was commissioned, built and sea tested in 1997. Crews were then assembled and trained, finance was raised and press coverage obtained. An extensive education pack was circulated to schools in Northern and Southern Ireland, Argyll and Bute. With awareness of the project established on both sides of the North Channel, events reached their zenith on 9th June 1997 when, following a service in St. Columb's Cathedral in Londonderry, the crew of 14 oarsmen and women set off by curragh on the 135 mile voyage to Iona, under the direction of skipper Robin Ruddock. Despite being stormbound on Rathlin and having to row to a tough schedule, the boat and its crew successfully reached Iona 6 days later to recount tales of foul weather and wonderful encounters with minke whales, seals and otters.

The aims of this voyage - the establishment of a **community spirit** amongst the crew and the communication of some of the positive aspects of Northern Irish life - were achieved and reinforced later that summer. In July a return crew, including some of the people who had accomplished the outward journey, left Portrush by fishing boat one Friday night. They arrived in Iona at dawn the next morning and, after retrieving the curragh from its boat house, making appropriate preparations by having a 'shake-down' row to Staffa island, set off on a challenging week's rowing and sailing back to Ireland.

This journey was instrumental in bringing the spirit of Colmcille to the crew itself and to the many Scottish and Irish coastal communities who, generously and selflessly, made pubs, church halls, food and other resources available to the Colmcille travellers.





North Channel - Tyree.

Iona

London Derry

Portrush

"Behold Iona!

A blessing on each eye that seeth it!

He who does good for others

Here will find his own good redoubled

Many-fold!"

Att Colmcille



The Life of Colmcille

Colmcille, also known as Columba, was born in Gartan in Co. Donegal in 521, about 50 years after the death of St. Patrick. He was of royal blood, being a descendant of Niall of the Nine Hostages. His mother, Eithne, was of the royal house of Leinster. It was possible that with these connections he might have become High King of Ireland one day.

He was given the name, Criomthach (Crivan) meaning wolf. His parents did not want him to become a warrior but a man of peace, so they sent him to be fostered by Cruitneachan, the priest who had baptized him. He was a good student and spent much time in the church. For this reason, he was given the name Colmcille, meaning Dove of the Church.

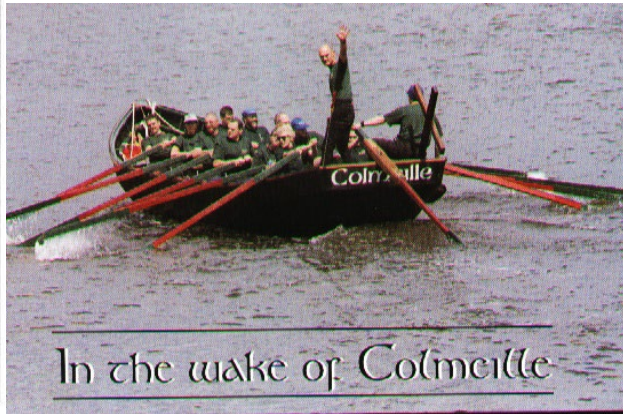
From Kilmacreannan he moved on to Movilla, near Newtownards, and later to St. Finnian's school at Clonard. His love of poetry led him to study with one of the great Bards, Gemman.

When he finally became a priest, Colmcille travelled around Ireland, preaching the word of God and setting up monasteries and churches. His first monastery was established at Derry in 548. This was in an oak-grove and because of Colmcille's deep love of nature he refused to cut down the oak trees. At this time Derry was an island and it became known as Doire Colmcille, Colmcille's oak-grove. He continued to travel and preach, but he was also engaged in copying and illuminating the Scriptures. e.g. The Book of Durrow.

One book particularly fascinated him. It was owned by Finnian of Clonard. Colmcille was given permission to look at the book but secretly he copied it. Finnian was furious when he heard and insisted that the copy be returned to him. Colmcille refused, so Finnian brought him before the High King. Finnian won the case. The High King's judgement was "To every cow its calf, to every book its copy", so the copy as well as the original book belonged to Finnian. Early copyright law!

It is said that Colmcille was angry and called on his kinsfolk the Northern O'Neills to avenge the insult. A great battle took place during which 3,000 men died. Colmcille was so filled with remorse that he left Ireland, vowing never to return until he had redeemed himself, by converting 3,000 souls.

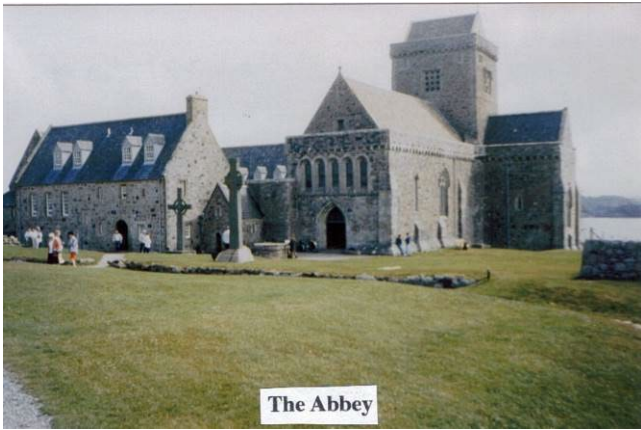
In 563 with a crew of twelve he set sail for Iona. Before landing he sought permission from King Conall of Dalriada and, having received it, established a monastery on the island.



On board "Island Fisher" out of Portrush en route to Iona to row Currach Colmcille back to Ballycastle.



Friday pm: an hour out of Portrush



The Abbey where we received hospitality and where we took active part in a Service.

"Shakedown" row - Iona to Staffa,

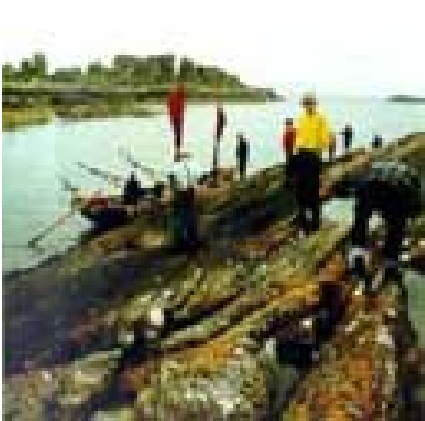


Saturday pm: Fingal's Cave



Saturday pm: on Staffa





No problems on the Garvellachs... but, on the Crinan Canal, dreech weather and ...midges ..



Friday pm: lunch break at mouth of Campbelltown Loch

Farewell to the canal - and the midges?

Last stop before ,

Ballycastle - good job well done!

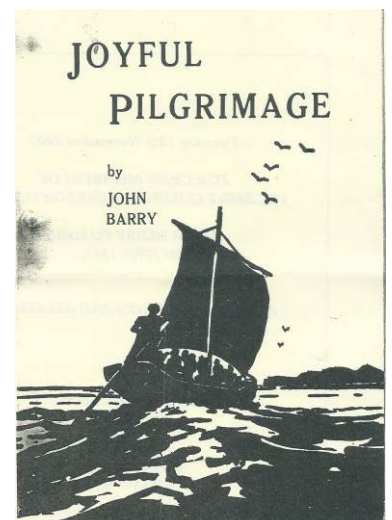


The crew "after"

from left,
back row - Peter, John L, Jim, Ivor, John N, Chris
centre - Stephen, Gary, Matthew, Donald (Skipper), Norman (Stroke), Dan
front - Connor, Norma, Jane, Catherine

1963

A voyage worthy of considerable admiration.





2023
John G Connolly
Back row, right.



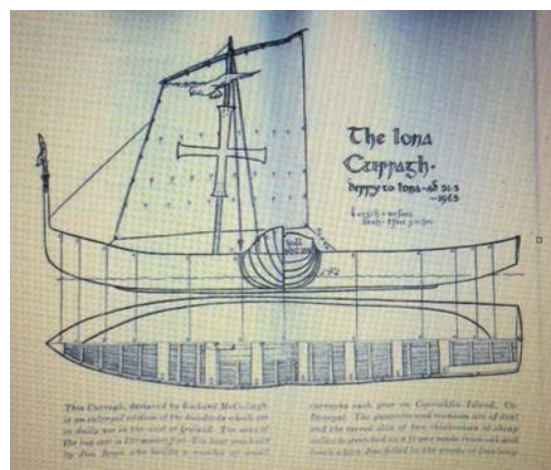
Fittingly, off St Columb's Park.



Looking equally good on the open sea.



1963 route



1963 curragh



Form +functionality = class



Awaiting new "skin". Classic lines and design shown to good effect.

Currach launched at Penzance and rowed to Marazion. Excitement tempered by the discovery that outboard motor had been taken by someone who thought they needed it more than we did



Colmcille crew camp at Marazion, Penzance, strategically located near the Station Bar.

Both crews hosted on St Michael's Mount by Lord and Lady St Levan for night before Channel crossing.

News of Joey Dunlop's death received. John Hamilton piped a lament on castle battlements.



Departing harbour at St Michael's Mount - passage of 34 hours awaits us ...



Marazion fisherman Joe, with his fishing vessel Ros na Riogh escorted both currachs across the Channel - another good job well done.



The Channel is a very busy seaway ...

Brest 2000



Brest Maritime Festival



Brest 2000; granite vessel - not much freeboard....

Very much a talking point.



In Breton waters: Currach Colmcille and crew looking good.



Off Brest

Hosted by Community Group,
Pontanezan, Brest





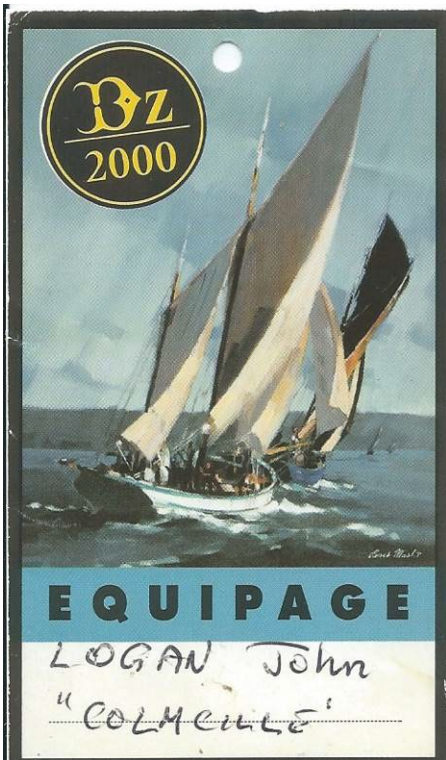
In Breton waters with leeboard
working hard.

Next vessel in line is Breton
Currach St Efflam.



JL with Isabelle Monbureau, one of the
founders of the Breton Maritime
Heritage Group, Au Marche de Cranou,
and a tour de force both on the water and
ashore.

A wonderful colleague.



Douarnenez Maritime Festival



Douarnenez campsite:
very pleasant but ...

"Towards Another Shore"

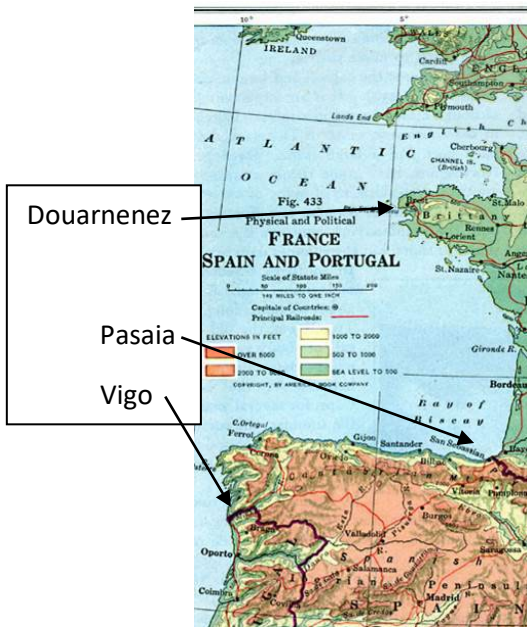
In May 2001 JL represented CCMHG at this symposium in Dournanez.

Currach Colmcille had overwintered in Douarnenez Maritime Museum and was given an airing on Baie de Douarnenez during the event. Tim Severin, Principal Speaker at the symposium and author of the Brendan Voyage, accepted an invitation to pull an oar and was impressed by all aspects of the currach



Towards Galicia, July-August 2001.

The title for this voyage was chosen judiciously We not only voyaged towards Galicia but ... we got there!



Nearly there - after a voyage of some 3,200 km....



Few waters in the world have as many lighthouses per sq km as have those of Brittany. They are much needed. Fortunately this passage was reasonably tranquil.



Not tranquil but exhilarating! A great sail into Ile de Groix but we paid a price....



Heavy following seas caused our steering gear/starboard to buckle. Fortunately Skipper Ivor is as skilled in welding as he is in leading a crew.



Bassin d'Arcachon

Damaged outer skin meant a trip to M. Bricolage for several tins of bitumen which was used to waterproof the hull after the tears had been patched and sewn.



St Jean de Luz: last port of call on the French (Basque) coast.



Passaia - impressive entry to the port!



Passaia: imposing location and Basque stronghold!

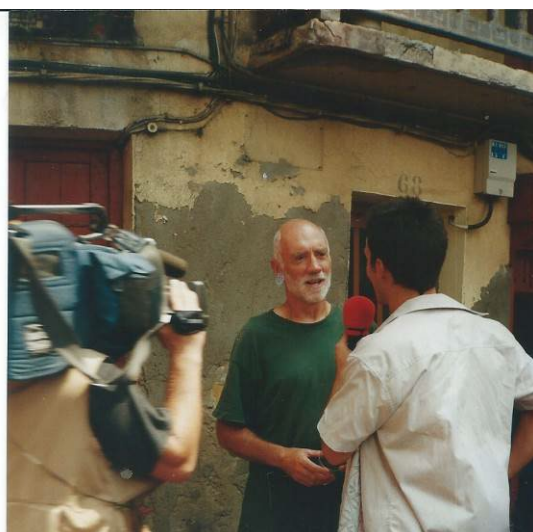
Welcome to Passaia!



Traditional Basque welcome



Sandrine had been on van duty



Welcome to a Basque microphone...

Heading west for Finisterre, the Atlantic and A Costa de Morte.....

A Costa de Morte (Finisterre to Vigo)



All is well - sailing south along Costa de Morte. Warm, following breeze ...



John's pipes help us celebrate another great day on our southward leg.



Can it beVigo ?

Getting the currach to Vigo was one thing. Getting it home was another...

The Retrieval of the Currach "Colmcille": 6th-13th October, 2001

Following "Towards Galicia", our successful traditional boat expedition from Brittany to Vigo in July and August 2001, our currach and the Breton currach had to be retrieved and brought home.



Saturday 6th October

The storms of earlier in the week had abated slightly as Jeremy (McCool), Robin (Ruddock) and I (John Logan) set off in Robin's Landrover at 0915 to Dublin. We were booked on the 1800 Dublin Swift sailing to Holyhead and we listened with some trepidation to the radio weather reports which warned of "the possibility of some disruption to Irish Sea ferry crossings". The Landrover was packed with equipment and personal belongings, sufficient, we hoped, to allow us to reach Vigo in northwest Spain and return with approximately one tonne and 12 metres of currach. On reaching Dublin port our fears were realised: the storm was preventing the Dublin Swift from sailing. Our complimentary passages, however, were transferred to the conventional but slower 2115 sailing. This presented no real problem as we knew that we still had sufficient time to make our rendezvous with our Breton colleagues in Plymouth next morning prior to the departure of the ferry to Santander.

Having decided to spend the afternoon in Dublin, we parked close to the Natural History Museum and enjoyed a leisurely hour investigating the exhibits. On returning to the Landrover, however, we discovered a puncture: no immediate problem was foreseen as the spare was sound and we had borrowed a hydraulic jack. There was a need to find somewhere in Dublin where we could get the puncture repaired and, as it was approaching shop closing time we began the search. Eventually, on the suggestion of a customer in a supermarket, we located a franchise tyre depot and were fortunate to find the proprietor doing what might be best termed as a "homer". Although he was officially closed, he did a marvellous job for us and we set off for the port in a greatly relieved state of mind.

Sunday 7th October

The crossing to Holyhead was uneventful and, on arriving on the British mainland, we wasted no time in heading east across north Wales and on to the M6. Sharing the driving we made good time through the night and did reach Plymouth well in advance of the ferry's departure. We were relieved yet again when we saw Colmcille's trailer waiting for us and, when we had completed the checking in process we saw Tristan, Isabelle and Dominique coming to meet us across the compound. They had transported our trailer, as well as their own, from Douarnenez via Roscoff to Plymouth. No mean feat! By this time the storm was at its fiercest in terms of wind and rain and we feared that our departure might be delayed. Should this have happened it could have had serious consequences for the entire expedition as we were working to an extremely tight time schedule. As it was, the ferry left on time, albeit in the teeth of the storm and we endeavoured to settle into conditions on the ship. Except for the weather these were by no means insurmountable - Truckline had provided us with complimentary passages which included cabins as well as entry to the commercial "Drivers' Club" where sustenance, both solid and liquid, was always available and always of high quality.

After dinner two anti-sea sickness tablets sorted out my 24 hours - no nausea and plenty of sleep, a good thing in the light of what was to come.

Monday 8th October

We docked in Santander some 5 hours late due to the storm and had already decided that we would head straight for Vigo, collect the boat and equipment and return immediately to Santander. The goal, after all, was our safe return and the safe return of the currach to our own north coast. On leaving the Brittany Ferries compound Tristan, who was towing the St Efflam trailer, was stopped by the Civil Guard. We remained unaware of the reason until we ourselves stopped some 20 miles from the city in order to refuel. As it turned out, the trailer's registration papers were in France and the trailer was impounded until the following day when they were faxed to the Spanish police. We travelled on through the night once again sharing the driving but this time with a trailer in tow. As for papers for our trailer - we knew nothing about papers!

Tuesday 9th October

Our outward route took us along the north coast of Spain and then south to Vigo where we arrived at 0600 after some 500 miles and 12 hours' driving. We parked outside the marina where Colmcille was stored and tried to catch up on some sleep in the Landrover - not an easy task. At 0730 I phoned our contact Roscio to arrange access to the store where our equipment had remained since August. Eventually I located her and she came down to meet us. Having followed her to the store, we loaded the Landrover with outboard, rudder, canopies, barrels etc and drove back to the marina. By this time it was open and the manager, Fernando, gave us considerable assistance, through the use of a forklift, in order to get Colmcille on to the trailer. All was safely secured by 1100 and, only 5 hours after arriving in Vigo, we set off for Santander, 500 miles to the northeast.

This time, on Fernando's advice, we took the inland route, a decision we were soon to regret. All went well for a couple of hours - the Landrover slowly but heroically pulled its load and the trailer up the long mountain autovias. At the top of one such incline, however, a single Civil Guard stepped out on the carriageway and waved us on to the roadside. I was driving and immediately produced my licence and my best Portuguese which allowed a reasonably comprehensible conversation to take place. This presented no problem but the same could not be said for the trailer and its load. We were, apparently, in breach of road traffic regulations - the traditional Irish red rag fluttering from the currach was insufficient in terms of warning other drivers of a "hazardous load". We were going to have to pay a fine of some £32 but there was another problem - we had no registration papers for the trailer. Purely and simply these did not exist, but the guard was not satisfied. He stated that he was within his rights to impound the trailer but I explained that its cargo was part of our country's cultural and maritime heritage and that we had to get it back to Ireland. Showing considerable humanity and some bemusement blended with reluctance he relented and allowed us to proceed once we had paid our fine. He led us off the autovia to a filling station where he said we could purchase the required hazardous load sign for the currach which does indeed overhang the trailer by several feet. No sign was available but he left us there with our promise to obtain one as soon as possible ringing in his ears.

Our hopes, prayers indeed, that the Guard would not radio ahead to colleagues about us were fulfilled. We tried several other filling stations without success but, by the same token, we were not stopped at any other point. With stress levels rising and Santander still some 350 miles away we decided to do-it-

ourselves and, stopping near a village, we located a hardware shop, bought a white plastic tray and adorned it with some of Jeremy's fluorescent red tape which had been fixed to several points on the trailer. At this particular moment, on this particular side road in an out of the way part of Spain, Tristan and Isabelle drove past! It turned out that they had come off the autovia to refuel but, as they were heading for Vigo and we coming from Vigo there was little point in trying to convene.

We drove on, still searching for the sign. In one filling station we noticed a jogger's fluorescent jacket and as the colours were right we bought it. Having folded it appropriately, we taped it on to our plastic tray certain that we were visible if not legal. We proceeded north eastwards. It was a beautiful night for driving even with a 12m currach in tow and the possibility of further police interest in mind.

Wednesday 10th October

Tiredness was a problem but we eventually reached Santander at about 0500, some 18 hours after leaving Vigo. We found a spot to park and while Jeremy and I tried to sleep in the Landrover, Robin laid out his sleeping bag on the oars of the currach and slept beneath the upturned boat. Come daylight we located a nearby public carpark and manoeuvred the trailer into a corner where we hoped we would be unobtrusive. We were only 10 minutes' walk from the Brittany Ferries compound but we discovered that we were not allowed access until Thursday morning, the ferry sailing at 1800 on that day. Thus we had some 24 hours to wait, hoping that the local police would not find us or, if they did, that their interest would be purely positive.

Peace between person and person,

Peace between kindred,

Peace between neighbours.

The peace of Christ above all peace.

Att: Colmcille



In hiding - but in Santander!

We spent the morning profitably. After exhaustive investigation we located a shop where we were able to buy the "hazardous load" sign and it was with some relief and some rejoicing that we returned to the carpark and fitted it on to the currach. While we were within striking distance of the ferry we had kept our promise and our decision to pursue the matter was to stand us in good stead.

In a more relieved but more tired state we explored the seafront area of Santander, ate a pleasant meal and retired to bed, me to the Landrover and Jeremy and Robin to the oars. Car headlights and human voices adjacent to the currach during the night conjured up thoughts of further police activity but that was not the case.

Thursday 11th October

Shortly after 0900 we walked along the seafront to the dock and found, to our great delight and relief, that the vehicle compound was open. We returned to the carpark, hitched up the trailer, checked our route through Santander's one-way system and headed for the compound where we arrived safely some 10 minutes later. Having parked we went into the café and enjoyed a large breakfast. On full stomachs and a comparative high we went "shopping" although not very much was bought. In early afternoon we returned to the port and waited for the Bretons to arrive. This they did shortly thereafter and we indulged in gentle and beer-free celebration which appeared to be somewhat premature when two members of the Civil Guard began to inspect vehicles in the compound. They found a problem with Isabelle's vehicles - she was towing the RIB - and they stated that because of a number plate problem they were going

to impound the trailer even though cars were already loading and we were only some 100 metres from the ferry door. The RIB would have to be removed and taken on the ferry by some other means.

Fortunately clear minds, cool heads and commonsense prevailed and the Guards decided not to take action. Indeed the Bretons had already been stopped and fined several times on their travels through Spain - we had been more fortunate. As the guards approached Colmcille we hoped, and prayed, that they would not find anything amiss. They walked around the back of the trailer, tested the security of our recently fitted sign and moved on! On entering the ferry itself we felt that no matter what happened from there the back of the mission had been broken. This was real relief.

The voyage back to Plymouth was pleasant. The sea was flat, the weather good and, of course, boats and personnel were safe. We enjoyed the hospitality of the Drivers' Club in the knowledge that we had stories to tell which would be unequalled by even the most experienced of truck drivers.

Friday 12th October

Plymouth appeared on time and we bade farewell to the Bretons. How good it felt to drive on the left hand side of the road once again! We made good time to Exeter but in the service area where we had called to refuel, I hit a kerb with the rear wheel of the trailer. The tyre took exception to this treatment and immediately expired. The hydraulic jack proved its worth yet again but we had a new problem - the spare which we fitted had a slow puncture. We drove carefully to the next service area where we bought a puncture repair aerosol. This proved to be the answer and the repaired tyre brought us back to Portrush incident free.

A notable feature of our experience changing the wheel was the attitude of the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary. They appeared out of thin air, in squad car and Transit van, virtually as soon as our tyre blew but they were helpfulness itself. They showed an interest in our venture and in the currach in particular and wished us well on our onward journey - what a contrast from our previous experiences.

to **Isabelle** and **Tristan** not only for their contribution towards the planning of the expedition but also for their comradeship. They had many negative experiences during their travels but their spirits were always high

to **Roscio** for her helpfulness in Vigo

to **Davilasport Marina**, Vigo, and particularly the manager, **Fernando**. He, like Roscio, could not do enough to help

to the **Galician Maritime Heritage Group**, particularly for their sponsorship of storage costs

to **Irish Ferries** (**Geraldine Ryan**) whose interest in the project and whose generosity were exceptional

to **Truckline** (**Steve Warner**) who, like Irish Ferries were exceptional in their interest and generosity.



Ever wondered what success and relief look like...?

St Columba's Voyage

Ballycastle - Iona - Portrush: June 2003

This voyage was the fulfilment of a dream. The dreamer was an American-Scot named Donald McCallum from Maryland who wished to lead a number of his fellow US citizens on a pilgrimage from Northern Ireland to Iona and there to commemorate the mission work of St Colmcille.



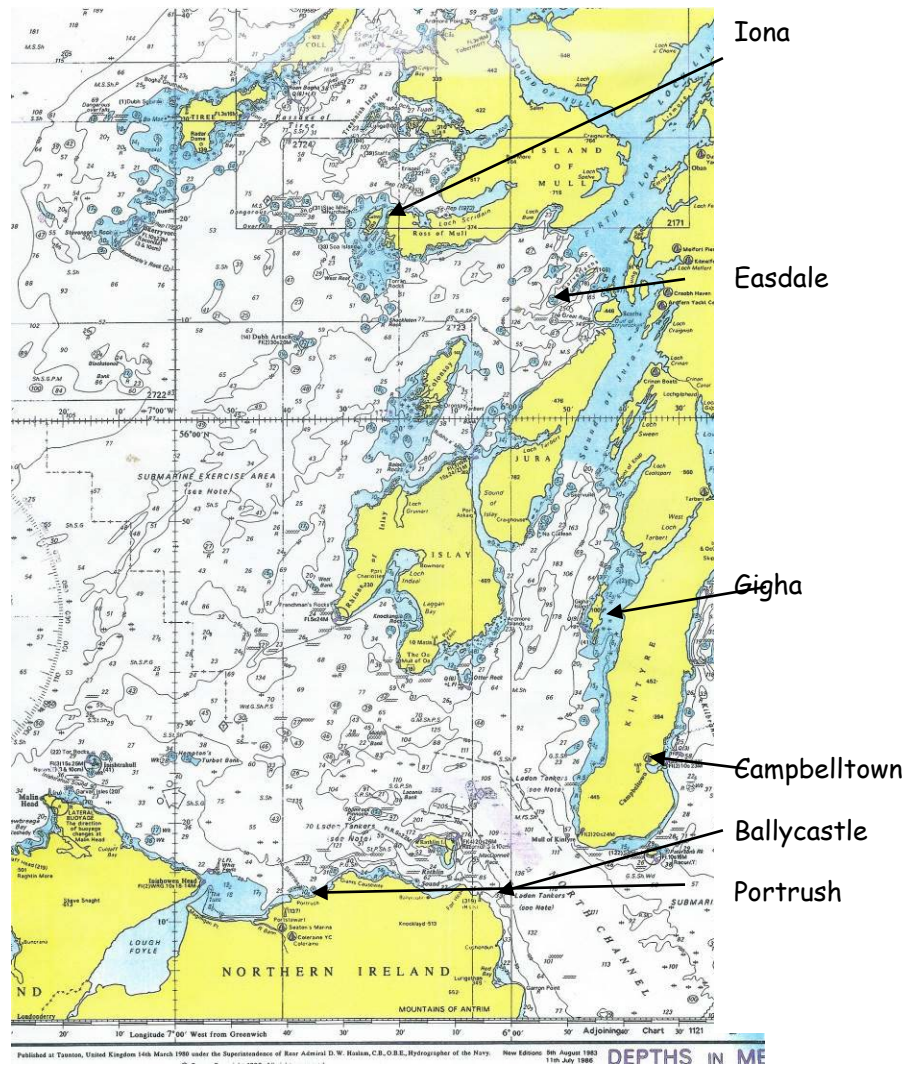
Donald's enquiries led him to the CCMHG and to Robin Ruddock who, after much discussion, agreed to skipper the Currach Colmcille to and from Iona. Donald's colleagues would, after training, be "crew" but some experienced CCMHG oarspeople would be aboard also.



Departing Ballycastle - in good order.



Catching tide off Fair Head



At Corrymeela before departure.



Phyllis. Who had travelled with land crew, lending a hand on Easdale Island.



While on the Gigha leg of our voyage and awaiting the passing of a storm, we visited a Columban site on the mainland near Portpatrick. On returning to Gigha we discovered that the currach's mooring line had broken and that the craft was on the rocks. Robin, Jim and I extricated the boat and wrestled it to the beach. Repairs were necessary..



Inspecting the damage....



So, what's happening?



From the outside...



...to the inside - then out again



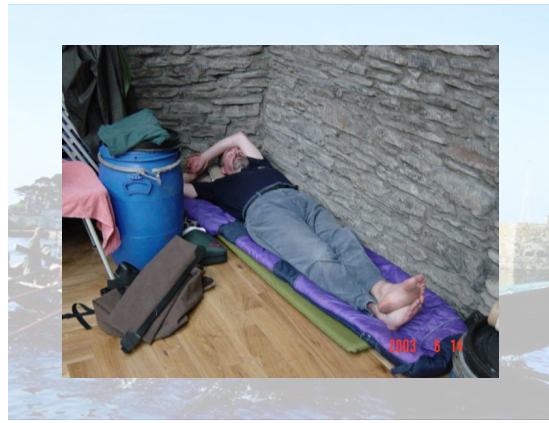
CCMHG flag still flying proudly.



Afloat again. Rounding Mull - no leaks! American crew, and Irish Stroke, comfortable with the situation.



Not at all in bad shape - well....

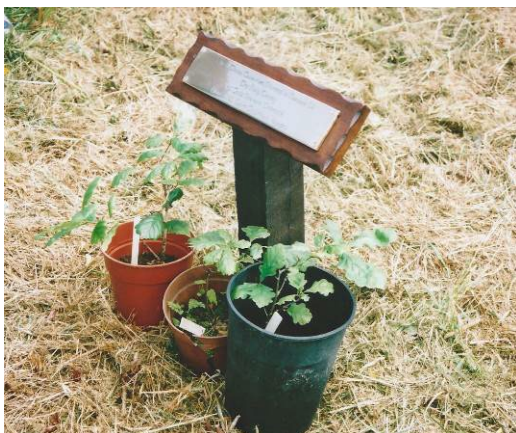


Not close even to 3 Star

accommodation but very welcome none the less



United States crew making currach
shipshape - under supervision?



Irish Oaks planted on Iona.



A memorable moment, especially for Donald.



Navigating Peace July-August 2003

This was a 7 week circumnavigation of Ireland involving the Currach Colmcille and the Basque Whaler Amerikaketik.

A major aim of the project was the promotion of peace and reconciliation



All quiet at Portrush Harbour



.....and

#



.... then they were gone, next stop Lough Swilly.

Ireland

Portrush - point of departure and arrival

Some of the ports and piers at which the flotilla stopped on Navigating Peace 2003.

Lough Swilly

Tory Island

Glencolumbkille

Inver

Killala

Achill Island

Struthan

Kilrush

Dingle

Rosscarberry

Cork



Portrush

Ballycastle

Glenarm

Donaghadee

Ardglass

Carlingford Dun

Laoire

Rosslare

Arrows indicate
direction of travel.



Owey Island West Donegal - a beautiful spot as long as there is no East in the wind ...



North Mayo - impressive geology...



Out of Achill. Wind astern so leebard redundant.



And, if the wind's not on your back, put your back into it.



All's well - have a cup of coffee....



Rosslare - heading North. Reception on board
Irish Navy vessel Grannuaile. Endless supply of
Irish Malt ...



Rosslare accommodation.



Entry to Strangford Lough.



Very strong incoming tide



Leaving Donaghadee with badly depleted crew but we made it to Glenarm where reinforcements appeared.



Out of Ballycastle heading home,



Nearly home - off the Skerries having last crew lunch. Now, round Reviggerly and along the "back of the hill."



Home - one very happy couple.



Two very happy crews and their supporters.

Navigating Peace demonstrated the manner in which The Causeway Coast Maritime Heritage Group was fostering peace and reconciliation

Colmcille and the Basque Whaler, Amerikatetic, visited some 34 ports on their 7 week voyage. In a number of these meeting were held with community groups. Discussion sessions were also held.

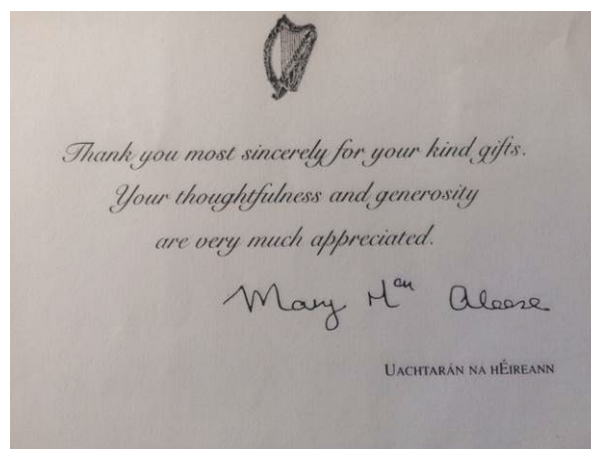
As a result of this project the crews were invited to a reception held by Irish President Mary McAleese at Aras an Uachtarain in Dublin.

The two maritime heritage groups agreed to organise a similar type of project, in Spanish waters and involving the same vessels, in 2005.



Aras an Uachtarain, Dublin, December 2003.

Most of the Basques had flown in for this event.



President Mary McAleese was the most pleasant, hospitable and interested of hostesses.

2005: Voyage from Vigo to Passaia involving Colmcille and Amerikatetik



Four intrepid mariners, having driven down from central France to Passaia, are now awaiting a train which, they hope, will take them to a meeting with Colmcille somewhere along the coast of North Spain...

The exploration of many tracks and sidings of the N Spain Narrow Gauge system was interesting but tiring....

Liason successful.

Crossing the bar at Mundaka and heading upstream to Gernika, a city almost obliterated by Franco's air force.



Final leg of the voyage upstream to Gernika. Shortly hereafter our Basque guides led us up the wrong branch of the river....



Catching the (very) early morning tide to help us back to Mundaka and the Bay of Biscay.

Enjoyable and worthwhile stay in Gernika but accommodation left something to be desired: sleeping on a gymnasium floor, faulty toilets, one tap (cold water) to service crew of Colmcille

Back on Biscay and heading East towards San Sebastian and Passaia.

Great sailing weather and a banana bap - what more could one want...?

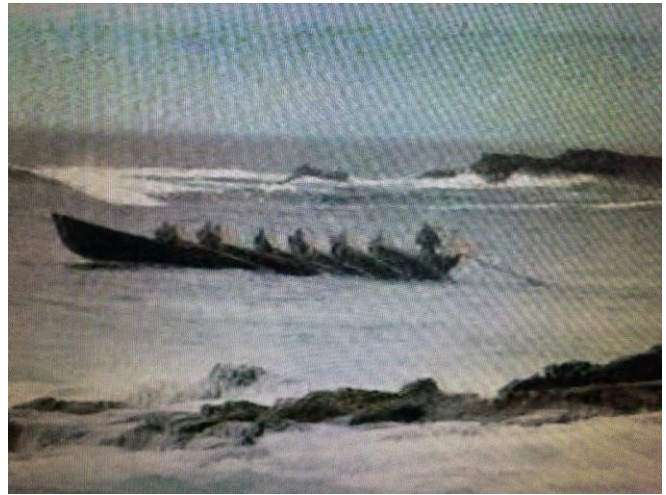


I thought I heard the old man say:

"You're some we'ans, let's get under way!"

Media - well, sort of ...

Colmcille and crew have featured elsewhere - in David Dimbleby's "Seven Ages of Britain", in RTE's "Eireann is Alba" and in RTE's "Blood of the Irish". During Derry/Londonderry's year as City of Culture Colmcille and crew played a considerable part when, late on the night of June 9th 2013, the curragh emerged from the shadow of the Peace Bridge with St Colmcille himself standing in the bow urging his oars-people onwards towards the confrontation with a sea monster which, according to legend, had suffered humiliation at Colmcille's hands some time before. On that warm, still night in June 2013, on a river as reflective as glass, in front of tens of thousands of enthralled spectators and with the Lawrence Hill building in view, Colmcille finally defeated the monster.



"Eireann is Alba" - RTE Off Reviggerly Point, Portrush



"Blood of the Irish" RTE R Boyne currach on Carlingford Lough

"Seven Ages of Britain" (BBC David Dimbleby)

Iona once more ... "Have my oar, David ..."



Sound of Iona.



"Thanks, David ..."

Of Columcille

"I myself will sit down at the helm'
It is God's own son who will give
me guidance,

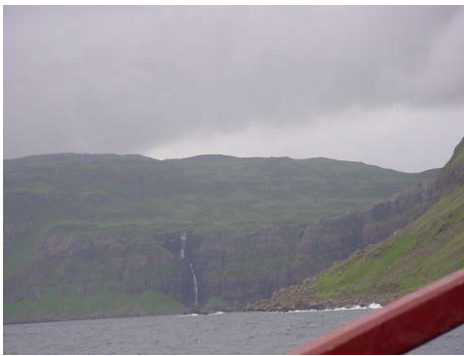
As he gave to Columba the mild

What time he set stay to sails."

From: Carmina Gaddica



Celia fiddles, Kate whistles while Orla, David, Jane, Ivor, Sandrine and Dan set the pontoon alight with rather nifty dance steps,,,,, (Foyle Maritime Festival)



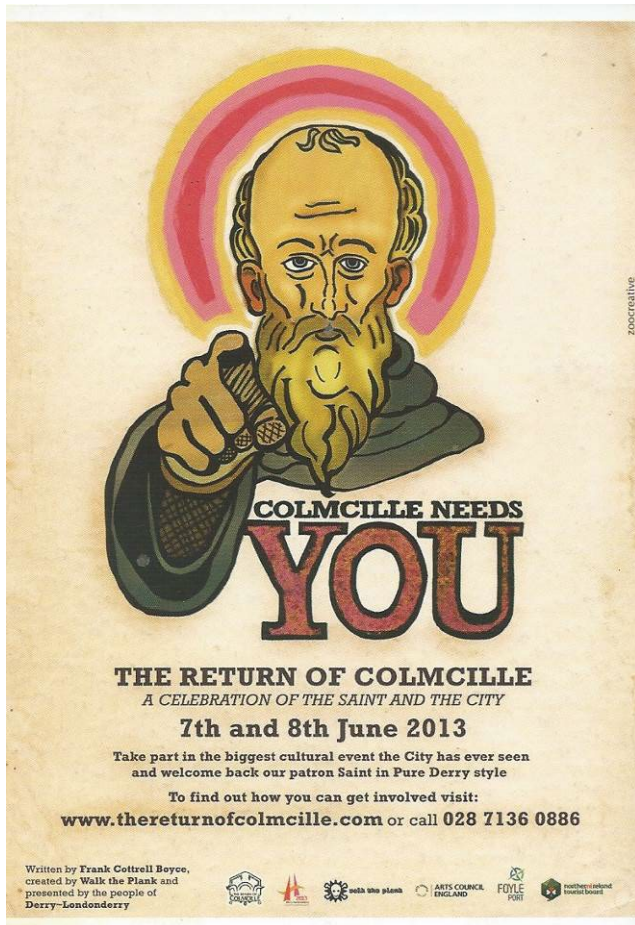
South side of Mull - white-tailed eagles spotted.



Heading downstream in the Bann estuary: Moville-bound.



Somewhere in Galicia



Fast forward to **2013** when, as European City of Culture, London Derry hosted "**The Return of Colmcille.**"

This pageant featured St Colmcille's battle with the sea monster he had first encountered on the River Ness.

Needless to say, the bold Saint gained the day, his judiciously aimed flares transforming the flaming creature into graceful swans

An estimated 25,000 spectators watched the encounter - perhaps they were, in fact, awaiting the fireworks display.....



Foyle College: a Columban Connection.



*"Be't latitude or longitude,
The Poles or the Equator
You'll always find a man who boasts
That Foyle's his Alma Mater".*

Foyle College, Lawrence Hill, Londonderry

A chance meeting with Robert (Montgomery) set in motion, from the rusty sidings of my mind, a train of thought. This concept, along with numerous others, had been very effectively introduced to me by Stewart Connolly in Room 9 of the Lawrence Hill building and it was on the subject of this impressive edifice, so iconic of Foyle College, that my conversation with Robert was focussed.

Foyle College is but one of architect John Bowden's works which are still greatly admired and Foyle, like many others of his buildings, has proudly withstood the test of time and its vicissitudes. We talked about the church of St Mura at Fahan, County Donegal, and the fact that this work of Bowden was named in honour of Mura, a familial connection of Columba, later Colmcille, the Dove of the Church. It was not surprising, therefore, that Mura established a Columban community in the 6th Century near where the church now stands.



Saint Mura's Church, Fahan Upper.

between Columban Ulster and Iona and by raising awareness of the man and his work. A 38 foot, 12 oar curragh was commissioned in Kerry, duly built and successfully sea-trialled. With boat and crew prepared, "Colmcille" left Derry Quay for Iona on 5th June 1997. Both the outward and return voyages were completed successfully with a former pupil of Foyle, myself, privileged to pull an oar on part of the voyage.

Since 1997 "Colmcille" has been used frequently in local waters - Lough Foyle, Portrush, Ballycastle ... to provide activities for community groups and to serve as a "classroom" for the development of nautical skills. The curragh and its crews have often voyaged far from home waters. In 2000 we rowed and sailed from Cornwall to Douarnenez, Brittany where Colmcille overwintered and in 2001 we voyaged from Douarnenez to Vigo in the Spanish region of Galicia. On this 6 week expedition we navigated the Bay of Biscay via the west coast of France and the north coast of Spain and, having rounded Finisterre, the Atlantic coast of Spain. Once more the ex-Foyle "Father of the Crew" had the privilege of pulling an oar but not just any oar, the stroke oar. One of his oars- people on this, as on other occasions, was one Phyllis Logan (née Gilmour), an old girl of Londonderry High School.

Two major expeditions followed in 2003: "Columban Voyage" in which three of us who knew the boat and the waters, led a crew of American Christians to Iona on their pilgrimage. This was immediately followed by "Navigating Peace", a 7 week circumnavigation of Ireland accompanied by our Basque colleagues in their traditional whaler, "Amerikatetic". On this voyage we stopped at 34 different ports, harbours and jetties and met with community groups and others where "peace" was the prime topic of discussion. Mary McAleese, then President of Ireland, heard of our project and invited all who had participated to a reception in Aras an Uchtaí in later in the year.

Foyle's connection with Columba does not end there, however. On June 5th in the Columban Year of 1963 a curragh, with a crew of 13, set off from Derry Quay to Iona thus replicating the voyage made by Columba and his followers in 563 AD. Amongst the crew was one John G Connolly who himself had strong connections to the aforementioned Room 9. But the link between Foyle and Columba was to continue for in 1996 the Causeway Coast Maritime Heritage Group began work on the project "In the Wake of Colmcille". One of those involved was myself, John P Logan, a Foyle College Old Boy.



The curragh Colmcille: Breton launch and at the opening of the Peace Bridge

It was planned that "In the Wake of Colmcille" would commemorate the 1400th anniversary of Columba's death by replicating the voyage, by strengthening links



The Curragh Colmcille, Saturday 9th June 2013.

City of Culture, Return of Colmcille - a Celebration of Saint and City.

But who was this Colmcille becloaked in gold? Might it have been a Foyle College Old Boy? Perhaps even he who had "fathered" many a crew and pulled many a stroke oar in waters near and distant...? Could he be Foyle College's current Columban connection.....?

W John P Logan (March 2016)

Ne Umquam Cesseris!

Enough said



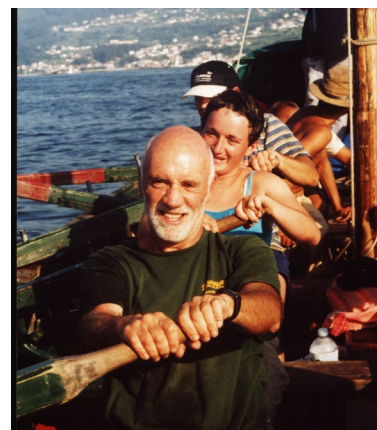
"Author"



1947 in *Grey Seal* at Port
an Dhu, Portrush



1955 in "wee green boat"
on Port Lough, Dunfanaghy



2003 Galicia
Costa de Morte



Phyllis, whose introduction to Colmcille was a mere pull southward down the Galician coast. This resulted in her becoming an accomplished oarsperson and a valuable crew member.

It was a pleasure to have shared so many sea miles with her.



Ivor, who skippered Colmcille on most of my voyages. A highly skilled seaman, a great organiser and a fantastic leader of people.



Robin, another inspirational figure. Excellent seaman whose knowledge of and love for the sea are exceptional. The inspiration and driving force behind the Colmcille project.



Frank, the highly creative, industrious and successful Chair of CCMHG during the years of major expeditions. A marvellous companion afloat and ashore.

Exceptional Colleagues. There are numerous others with whom I had the pleasure and privilege of rowing Colmcille. Let this be my tribute to them: **"They're some we'ans! What are they?"**