

Inchagoill

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Inchagoill is the fifth largest island in Lough Corrib but is the largest island in the lake not connected to the mainland via a causeway as are Inismicatreeer and Inchiquinn on the eastern shore and Inishdooras on the tip of the Dooras peninsula. Inchagoill lies approximately midway between Cong and Oughterard. The island is 1.2 km long and its width ranges from 400 m to 500 m. The island is now completely covered by trees. The trees in the centre of the island were felled some years ago by Coillte. However, a collar of trees was left around the periphery of the island. The centre of the island is now populated by a mixture of natural and artificial regeneration. There is a pathway all around the island. An annual public Mass is held on the last Sunday in June. The Guinness 'Coffee House' is located on the northwest corner of the island.

There is an excellent harbour with piers on the north east of the island which is sheltered from the prevailing south westerly winds. A path from the harbour leads to an ancient ecclesiastical enclosure which contains a graveyard and two churches. The graveyard is the resting place of numerous Sullivans, Kinnaveys, Murphys and Butlers, surnames that are common in the surrounding area, particularly the Dooras Peninsula.

The Kenneaveys (Kinneavey now) started building boats in 1861 on Inchagoill Island - they built row boats, sail boats and pucans. This continued down the generations and when Martin Kenneavey and his family moved to the Oughterard in 1922 they continued to build boats at Camp Street up until 1966.

The older of the two churches is Teampall Phádraig or St Patrick's Church dates from the 5th century and bears all the characteristics of its period in its narrow square-headed doorway with inclined jambs and the Cyclopean style of its masonry. This church is over 34 feet in overall length and has no roof.

Adjacent to it is a monumental stone dating from the 6th century containing one of the very earliest Christian inscriptions in Ireland. The origin of the inscriptions together with the name of the island itself has now become the subject of intense debate.^{1,2}

To the southeast of Teampall Phádraig lies Teampall na Naomh, the Church of the Saints. It is reckoned to date from the 12th century and is much more modern in its architecture. The door is Romanesque and the surrounds are highly decorated in a style which is an excellent example of early Irish decorative art as it precedes the Anglo-Norman conquest. For those interested in the details of these churches consult Wilde's Lough Corrib, first published in 1867 and re-printed by Kevin Duffy (Headford) in 2002. The text is currently available on-line at <http://www.galway.net/galwayguide/history/wrwilde/>. There is also extensive photographic information on YouTube.

In many publications as indeed is the case in Wilde's Lough Corrib the translation of the place name Inchagoill is given as 'Inis an Ghaill Chráifigh' or 'The Island of the Holy Foreigner. Indeed William Henry in his article on Inchagoill in the Galway Independent of 3 June 2015 repeats this assertion. According to many, the name derives its association with

Lugnaedon, the nephew of St. Patrick. The Lugnaedon pillar stone in the Inchagoill graveyard is reckoned to be the most important of its type in Ireland.

The study of place names was of great interest to the late Professor Seán Ó Cinnéide and in his latter years he applied his language expertise and skills to interpreting the place names of Lough Corrib and its hinterland (Feasta, July 2005, p.13). Joseph Mannion wrote an adaptation of several of Ó Cinnéide's articles in volume 59 of the Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society (2007). According to Ó Cinnéide evidence of Celtic mythology is almost everywhere to be detected in the toponymy of Lough Corrib and its hinterland. I (MJH) spent many hours explaining to him how the local Irish speakers pronounce(d) the name of the island and his assertion that the last syllable was pronounced as 'goil' the genitive of 'gol' is due to me!

A pdf of Joseph Mannion's article may be downloaded with the kind permission of the Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society.

A number of families lived on Inchagoill (see 1911 census) and the remnants of their houses are to be seen on the east of the island a short distance from the churches. Among them was Martin Kenneavey (Kinneavey today) and his family. He was a boat builder and was married with four children. He moved to Camp Street in Oughterard in 1922 and two of his children followed their father into the boat building trade and plied their trade in Oughterard. Kinneavy boats were highly prize and my father bought one when he moved to Cornamona in March 1943. Another of Martin's sons joined the priesthood and I can remember been at the annual Mass on the island celebrated by this priest many years ago. Over the years, the cottages fell into ruins and were overgrown by bushes, trees etc. However, in 2013 a Community Employment Scheme was proposed by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) in conjunction with Coillte, Office of Public Works (OPW) and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and SOLAS (formerly Fás) in order to carry out some remedial work on the island. The aim was to enhance the visiting experience for angler and tourist alike. Inland Waterways Ireland Corrib Branch subsequently became involved and raised a significant sum of money to assist the project. The initial work concentrated on the village area and the project has been a fantastic success. Many of the stone walls have been restored and the workmanship is a credit to the skills of the workers involved in the project. The houses and some of the outhouses have been restored to roof level. As this is being penned, work has begun on restoring the 'Coffee House'.

The last man to live on the island was Thomas (Tommie) Nevin. He was the Guinness caretaker and lived in a lovely thatched cottage overlooking the harbour. He lived there 1948 when he moved to Cong. He died there in 1964. The Guinness family provided him with a battery radio, a rare commodity in those days and it is reputed than over 100 people travelled to listen the Galway – Kerry All-Ireland football final on Tommie's radio. Tommie's cottage has been largely restored and only lacks a roof and windows. In addition, the trees blocking the view of the harbour have been removed and the structure looks very much like it did when Nevin resided there.

1. Seán Ó Cinnéide, *Logainmneacha* in *Feasta*, Iúil, 2005, lch. 14.

2. Joseph Mannion. Vestiges of Celtic Mythology in the Placenames of Lough Corrib and its Hinterland, *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, Volume 59 (2007) pp. 19-23.
3. Inchagoill – Island of the Devout Stranger by William Henry, *Galway Independent*, 3rd June 2015.