

thesis

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3RD FINE ART

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the curragh

My main purpose in choosing the curragh as a theme for a thesis is to try to reveal and to gain some understanding of this boat.

I grew up in an area (Castlegregory in the north of West Kerry) where curraghs are still being used, but their popularity as fishing vessels is practically no more. They are mainly used now for curragh racing which is a popular annual event among west of Ireland fishermen and also as tenders to the larger wooden boats.

The number of curraghs being made today are few. As well as fishing and racing they are also being occasionally made for export to such places as Australia, U.S.A. and Europe. Since about 1960, Bord Iascaigh Mhara began to aid fishermen, with generous grants, to purchase larger wooden boats. The curraghs are being used as tenders to the trawlers anchored in deeper waters off shore.

It is likely, with the improved harbours, that the curragh will go completely out of use, as a vessel used by fishermen.

The term "curragh" is employed for all varieties of craft found in Ireland. The Irish term for this craft is "currach" or "curach". The English equivalent, which comes from the Irish, is "curragh". The term appears in various archaic forms - curchāns, churchēns in ancient narrative. In Kerry and Clare, the term used is "naomhōg". "Canoe" is used in some Anglo-Irish speaking areas (such as where I come from).

Throughout this article I will use the term "curragh".

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INTRODUCTION

Before boats and ships, man must have ^{had} recourse to a wide variety of rafts. He must have developed an understanding of materials and their ~~av~~ailability. Materials which varied according to the environment as in Egypt, when the Nile was once flanked by masses of Papyrus, and wood was not available, the first floats consisted of bundles of rushes tied together.

A close example of this type of raft can be seen in modern Peru where costal fisherman use reed rafts known as caballitos (these are believed to date back to around 1200 B.C.). Development proceeded on different lines in Mesopotamia and ^{the} Eastern Mediterranean. On the Euphrates and Tigris, where Papyrus was unavailable, a float, consisting of an animal hide, inflated with air, provided a means of transport. A man could lie on it and kick or paddle himself ~~across~~ a river.

A close relative of this skin float is the skin boat. It basically consists of a hide covering, sewn together, and stretched over a wood frame. Such craft survive today in the kayaks of the Eskimos, the coracles of Wales and the curraghs of Ireland.

EARLY RECORDS AND HISTORY OF THE CURRAGH

There are no records known as to the origin of the skin covered boat. There are, however, records mostly made by the Romans, who had the facilities to record such things.

Over two thousand years ago curraghs, or skin covered boats, were used throughout Ireland and Britain. Timmaeus, the Roman historian who died C. 256 B.C. reported that the "Britains sail in boats of osier, covered with sewed hides".

Caesar who conquered Britain in 55 and 54 B.C. also recorded that the Britains were using curraghs, while campaigning in Spain in 49 B.C. he put his observations to good use. His army were obstructed by the flooding of the river Segre so he ordered his carpenters to build " boats of the kind that his knowledge in Britain a few years before had taught him". The carpenters made frames of keels and ribs of light wood. The rest of the hull was wrought in wicker work and covered over with hides. The use of keels show that these could not have been coracles but were more like the Irish curraghs in form.

In the 3rd century A.D., classical writer Solinus, noted that the sea between Hibernia and Britain "is rough and stormy and is navigable in the year for a few days only; they voyage in small boats formed of pliant twigs covered with skins of oxen. During the time they are at sea, they abstain from food".

According to the early story-tellers or bards of Ireland, voyages in skin covered boats or curraghs were undertaken. These voyages were called "Imramha" and were carried out by men in search of heavenly and earthly paradise. This paradise was supposed to exist west of Ireland. It was called Mag Mell in ancient literature and Hy Brasil (Irish, Ui Breasail) in modern folk tales.

There are many stories told of Imramha, in curraghs, in ancient Irish story-telling, - the voyage of Teigue, son of Cian, where he voyages to Spain seeking his kidnapped wife. His vessel is a curragh built with

twenty five thwarts and is covered with "forty ox-hides of hard bark-soaked leather".

In olden times, the measurement of a curragh was denoted by the number of hides, each hide being sufficient to cover an area of 6 ft. long by 4 ft. wide. This explains when a curragh was said to be made of two, three, ... hides. There is no record of a curragh being made of two hides thick in construction.

In the voyage of the three sons of Ua Carra, the story tells us that men in preparation for a voyage of pilgrimage, had a great curragh built "covered with hides three deep and capable of carrying nine persons". Five others were also allowed to accompany the party.

Another series of voyages were the "Longeas". These were voyages undertaken involuntary. Some were imposed as a penance by the Church. Others by the lay power as a punishment for a crime. An example of a typical longeas is related to the life of St. Patrick, where we are told, an Ulsterman named MacCuill, committed himself to the mercy of God in a curragh, without oar or paddle, for a penance imposed by St. Patrick.

Around the middle of the sixth century, Irish monks began to voyage from Ireland across the seas in search of adventure, or a quiet home, or with a view to spreading their Gospel, in skin-covered boats. The most famed of these monks was St. Brendan. In his account, which is in Latin, he tells us in detail, the principal features of the Irish curragh of the 6th. century. We are told how the Saint and his companions "Using iron tools, prepared a very light vessel, with wicker work sides and ribs after the manner of that country (Ireland) and covered it with cow-hide tanned in oak bard (rubriccetis in cortice robina), tarring its joints, and put on board provisions for forty days, with butter enough to dress the hides for covering the boat, whenever they needed repair, and all utensils necessary for the use of the crew" (Joyce 1903). A tree (mast) was fitted amidships and a sail and the equipment required for the steering of a boat were provided. At the end of five years Brendan and his companions returned to Ireland. Brendan's foster-mother Itha, disapproved of sea voyages in frail curraghs, so on his second journey he used boats made from wood. Brendan's first curragh voyage would probably have

been 519 A.D. to 524 A.D. His second voyage, where he journeyed, possibly to the Azores, would have been from 525 A.D. to 527 A.D. in a wooden boat.

Other Irish Saints also voyaged from Ireland; one of these was St. Columba. He used currachs in his voyages to and from Iona. Twelve companions accompanied him in a large currach on his first voyage (around 563 A.D.) to the island. They landed at a little bay which is still called Port Na Curaich (The Bay of the Currach).

St. Cormac who was a disciple of St. Columba used a currach in his three voyages in search for solitude.

The community of monks in Iona, according to Adamnan, who was successor to Columba as Abbot of Iona, not only possessed currachs but also a wide variety of wooden crafts. These included dugout canoes and several types of plank-built vessels.

Currachs were not only used by the religious but also by traders and plunderers. During the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries, raids on England and Wales by the Irish were particularly active. These raids were always carried out in currachs. But the appearance of the Norsemen and Danes on the Eastern seaboard, in the 8th and 9th centuries and their seizure of all sea trade, entailed a complete revolution in the design of Irish boats and ships. The currach survived only on the western coast for coastal fishing and local coastal trade.

THE CURRAGH IN GENERAL

In Ireland curraghs are found almost entirely along the west coast. Four major types still exist: those of Donegal, North Mayo, the Aran Islands and the Dingle type. Of these the Donegal curragh is regarded as being the most primitive, while the Dingle curragh is described as the most refined in construction.

All curraghs are constructed bottom upwards. The gunwales are shaped first and all the frame work is formed by them. In all curraghs, except the Boyne curragh, the gunwales are made in two sections - (a) a fairly horizontal main or body section and (b) a curved bow section, sheered up (except in those of the Rosses). The joint is secured by a shoulder piece which locks the ends of both pieces together. The bottom sides are put into position later which is in J. Hornell's (British coracles and Irish Curraghs, 1938) opinion "most unusual in boat construction". Experiment would show that it is much easier to arch the ribs over the gunwale than to fasten them and the stringers to the ground and then to bend them upwards for insertion into mortices in the underside of the gunwale frame. The first method enables the builder to exercise more control over the bending of the ribs.

In curraghs with two gunwale frames, the lower gunwale is first constructed which will eventually be the side to face upwards. The thwarts are then nailed on to secure the parts in place. Then work begins on the upper gunwale. When finished short sub-vertical struts or "standards" (or stanchions) are inserted between the two gunwales, holding them apart at a measure of about 5 or 6 inches. This completes the double gunwale which is then turned upside down to allow the ribs and stringers to be built up to form the bottom and sides.

In some curraghs (Connemara and Mayo) the stringers widen into thin planks, touching one another at the sides. Here the curragh has actually evolved into the image of a plank-built boat, the difference being that a tarred cloth cover is used in order to prevent the need to caulk the seams of the planking. In the Dingle curragh, the stringers are narrow laths, fairly widely separated, thus retaining the memory of lattice-work basketry, characteristic of the coracle.

The rib-frames are formed also of laths in the majority of sea-going curraghs, but in Donegal, paired withies are still used in some curraghs as ribs and also the Boyne river curraghs use both ribs and stringers.

Some curraghs have seats which are unfastenable. Others are fixed as thwarts. The Donegal curragh has one fixed thwart.

Curraghs are propelled by oars although the majority of curraghs nowadays use out-board engines. The oars which pivot on a thole-pin pass through a heavy block nailed to the after side of the loom. The blades are narrow and cannot be feathered because of the method of pivoting. The blade of the oar can only exceed the diameter of the shaft by a very small amount, otherwise it would foul the water on the return stroke. Curragh oars are therefore long and thin, length being needed to compensate for the thinness of the blade. A long oar will obviously be heavy and to make up for this a "bull" or thick piece of wood is usually fitted at the point where the oar passes the thole-pin (being near the hand grip). The shape of the bull differs from area to area. In rowing the oarsmen pulls "cross-handed" with oars overlapping, one hand above and slightly in advance of the other. In the North Mayo curragh both hands are required because of the weight and length of one oar. A similar type of oar, to the west of Ireland oar, is used by sardine fishermen of Portugal (Setubal and Oporto). A similar one also recurs in Madeira.

A sail is carried by the larger Dingle curraghs and a small one by large Aran Island boats. All others depend solely upon oars or paddles. Paddles are used in areas only where curraghs retain very primitive characteristics in form and construction.

There are many variations in shape and method of construction evident in Ireland - from the Boyne paddling curragh to the Dingle curragh. The most primitive in construction is the Boyne paddling curragh. Oval in design, with doubled hazel wands and an undeveloped gunwale - the whole frame being covered with a hide of a single ox.

Donegal curraghs have only one gunwale as in the curragh of the Rosses. These boats are usually 8 to 9 feet in length. They differ from the Boyne type as they substitute a gunwale

of twisted withies for a wooden gunwale and the employment of laths as ribs and stringers, and tarred canvass for tanned hide. Other differences are the introduction of removable thwarts and thole pins - which permits the vessel to be rowed as well as paddled. The paddler kneels near the bow and paddles over it.

The next stage in curragh development occurs in Donegal also. In the curraghs of Sheephaven the length increases from fifteen to twenty feet. They are four feet wide amidship and one foot, ten inches deep. The fore end is pointed and one, at least, of the thwarts is fixed. Oars are always used, each pivoted to a thole pin which passes through a hole in a block fixed to the loom.

The north Mayo curragh is a much grander vessel than its Donegal counter-part. It is up to 24 feet in length and is 4 feet wide and 25 inches deep. A new feature is introduced and is common to all curraghs from Mayo to Dingle - this is the double gunwale consisting of an upper and lower wooden gunwale. They are held apart by a series of struts or standards, 5 to 6 inches in length. It is rowed by four men each handling only one oar (unlike all other curraghs, which are rowed double handed) and is steered by the fifth man, who uses an oar placed over the stern. These vessels were traditionally used for salmon fishing and carried five nets each six feet deep and between them stretched half-a-mile. The ribs are often made of bent withies and the stringers are of laths. The oars do not rest on thole pins as in other types of rowing curraghs, but manoeuvre between two thole pins. They are often heavy weighing, sometimes from 50 to 60 pounds each and they differ in size from bow to stern. Also the curraghs of north Mayo are oared double handed - one man to one oar. This occurs only in the north Mayo curragh.

The long profile of the Aran Islands curragh is angular rather than curved. It has two gunwales and varied in length from 16 feet to 18 feet and is up to 4 feet 3 inches in width amidship and has a depth of about 20 inches. They have a marked shear to the bows and a blunt transom-like stern. Thin laths are also used inside, providing considerable protection to the skin or covering. This was important when

transporting cargoes of farm produce, peat, etc. in the boats to the islands. Both stringers and ribs are also made of laths and all the thwarts are secured. The oars (unlike those of Mayo) pivot the thole pins also. The crews usually number three, although this varies with the size of the boat, from two to four, occasionally with a fifth man as steersman. Unlike currachs from other parts, except Dingle, those of the Aran Islands are sometimes sailed. This is mainly due to the distances between the islands (Aran and Blaskets) and the mainland. A squarish lug sail was used (no longer used) which was on a mast of about 8 to 10 feet. The sail was attached to a bamboo yard which was hauled to the top of the mast so that the sail billows out at the bottom. Sheets lead off the bottom corners and were tied to the kness (wooden brackets which join the thwarts to the gunwales).

The Dingle curragh (Dingle Peninsula and the Blasket Islands) has been described as " the most elegant, the most beautifully proportioned and the most carefully made of all surviving types they ride the water more lightly than the sea-fowl yet are strong enough to battle successfully with the wild Atlantic gales". They have practically no straight timber in their design as one curragh builder in West Kerry commented, "Almost every piece of wood in one of these craft if not curved, is aslant (except the thwarts of course). Everything too has to be balanced with extreme exactitude".

One's first impression of the Dingle curragh suggests that its design is an imitation in laths and canvass of a plank built boat. but when one considers the evolution in design, which exists, then the plank built origin can hardly be accurate. They vary in length from 16 feet to 25 feet and also in width from 4 feet to 4 feet 6 inches amidship, but are only 2 feet wide at the stern. Both gunwales curve from stem to stern but the bows are far more curved than the stern. Unlike the Aran type, the Dingle curragh narrows sternwards from its widest point amidship ending in a square stern that below the bottom gunwale curves into the rounded bottom. The stringers and ribs are both made of laths although the gunwale is made of thicker oak. The number of thwarts vary from two to four depending on the length. For boats using sails there is a small thwart for ard. A curved keelson, not found in other

curraghs, passes from stem to stern.

The larger Dingle curraghs also had sails. A mast of 10 to 11 feet (about 3 inches in diameter) passed through the front thwart. It was placed in a socket nailed across the eighth and ninth ribs. This sail provided a faster journey between the islands and the mainland. A crew of three occupy the 1st, 2nd and 4th thwarts when net fishing as the nets are (were) stowed below the 3rd thwart. Livestock was also carried in this same position.

When landed, curraghs are stored, bottom up. Because they are made of thin curved lathes they would warp under their own weight if left right-side up on the ground. The common position is to support the bow from straining is to support the shoulder splice. In exposed, gale-swept areas, stone walls were built (land docks) round each curragh for protection. In Dingle, they are supported to about 3 feet from the ground on stout wooden posts, placed in the most sheltered area.

Curraghs are very finely balanced and are swift in the water. One has to sit still in them or they sway about, even an uneven stroke is likely to put them off course, yet apart from all this they are very stable. Synge, when writing of a storm, may have best described curragh travel, when he said ".... in this shallow trough of canvass that bent and trembled with the motion of the men, I had a far more intimate feeling of the glory and power of the waves than I have ever known in a steamer". Maurice O'Sullivan of the Blasket Islands, described how " the curragh was mounting the waves, then down again on the other side, sending bright jets of foam into the air every time she struck the water. I liked it well until we were in mid-bay. Then I began to feel my guts going in and out and as the curragh rose and fell I became seven times worse". Not all curragh journeys, however, are as bad as O'Sullivan's experience as Synge pointed out.

A DETAIL OF THE WEST KERRY RACING CURRAGH TODAY

Curragh building is still carried on in West Kerry today but is not substantial. The majority of curraghs, in this area, are constructed for competition in curragh racing or regattas, which are held annually in the area and also up along the west coast of Ireland. This sport acclaims the finer qualities of curragh building. Naturally emphasis is put on speed but the construction and shape is basically the same as in the ordinary fishing curragh.

A four handed racing curragh is acknowledged, among competitors, to be not more than 25 feet in length because they claim the longer the vessel the swifter. It also has a more curved bottom or underneath which is another asset when competing. In construction the gunwales are first shaped or modelled. These are prepared separately. The main gunwales, which are 19 feet in length, are first shaped and then the bow gunwales, which are 6 feet, are assembled to the main gunwales. The wood used for the main gunwales is white deal and is $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness. The wood used in the bow gunwales is teak and is $2\frac{1}{2}$ by $\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness.

The four main gunwales, (two upper and two lower) firstly have to be shaped. This is done by steaming them. Various methods have been used for steaming gunwales but no one method has been settled upon. A method used recently (which is a modern one) is where the four main gunwales are tied together and fastened at one end. A plank is inserted underneath and placed to determine the angle of curve (two feet). They are then wrapped in polythene and tied at both ends. Steam is then inflated into the polythene bag and the gunwales can be easily shaped. SEE FIG. 1 ... Another and more traditional method applied is where, again, the four main gunwales are tied together, they are then placed in a wooden box open at both ends: at a right angle and underneath the box there is a funnel like opening. The ends of the box are both stuffed and the funnel is then placed over a pot of steaming water which is fired. SEE FIG. 2

After the gunwales are shaped the seats are put on the lower gunwales. The seats measure 4 feet in length and are

7 by $\frac{1}{4}$ inches in thickness. The length of the seats will determine the width of the boat. To the centre of each seat there is a measure of 45 inches. Mortises are then cut out of the gunwales, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches centre to centre. Knees are then put on and screwed to the seats. Stanchions are then cut, from white deal which are 2 inches by 1 inch in thickness. These are rounded at both ends. SEE FIG. 3. The top gunwales are then put in position to mark off the positions of the stanchions. Holes are then bored for the stanchions. At this stage the stanchions are already assembled to the lower gunwales. The top gunwale is then assembled. The stanchions are painted at both ends to prevent rotting and it also makes assembly easier. The bow gunwales are next assembled to the main gunwales. A "shoulder block" is first assembled to the main gunwale and then the bow gunwales are joined in place. SEE FIG. 4 ...

The four gunwales (the frame so far) are then turned upside down. Forty or so ribs (from side to side) are placed in a pipe which is heated. The ribs which measure 5 feet in length and are $\frac{1}{4}$ by $\frac{1}{8}$ inches in thickness (parana pine) are then put in what is called a "former" until needed. This holds the ribs in position SEE FIG. 5 ... When required, the ribs are assembled to the gunwales. The main "lath" is put on at the centre. The remaining laths are nailed on to the ribs with $\frac{1}{4}$ inch copper nails. The laths are 15 feet in length, white deal, and are $1\frac{1}{2}$ by $\frac{3}{8}$ inches in thickness. They are sometimes shorter in length and are joined at the centre of a rib, but not all the joints are in the one place. The laths are put on at intervals of one half of an inch at the bottom increasing the space by a quarter of an inch up to the gunwales. SEE FIG. 6 ... Extra, shorter ribs are put on where the foot rests are positioned because this area would be more used.

When the frame is completed it is painted and canvas, 3 feet in width, is layed over the frame for seams to be marked. When marked, extra bits are cut off and the canvass is sewn together. The cnavass was traditionally hand sewn, but today however, sewing machines are used. The canvas is then placed over the curragh frame. One half is folded back and tar, which has been boiled for two hours is used to stick the canvas to the laths. One yard of canvas is tared inside and placed in position. It is then tacked along the upper gunwale with

FIG. 1

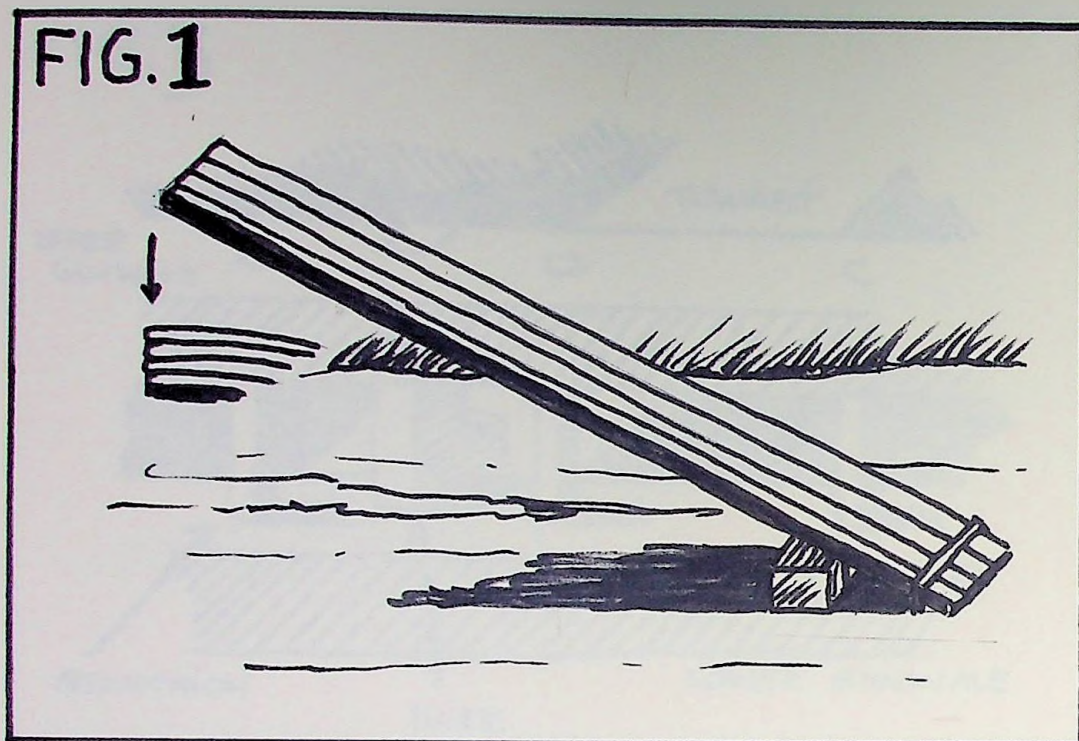


FIG. 2

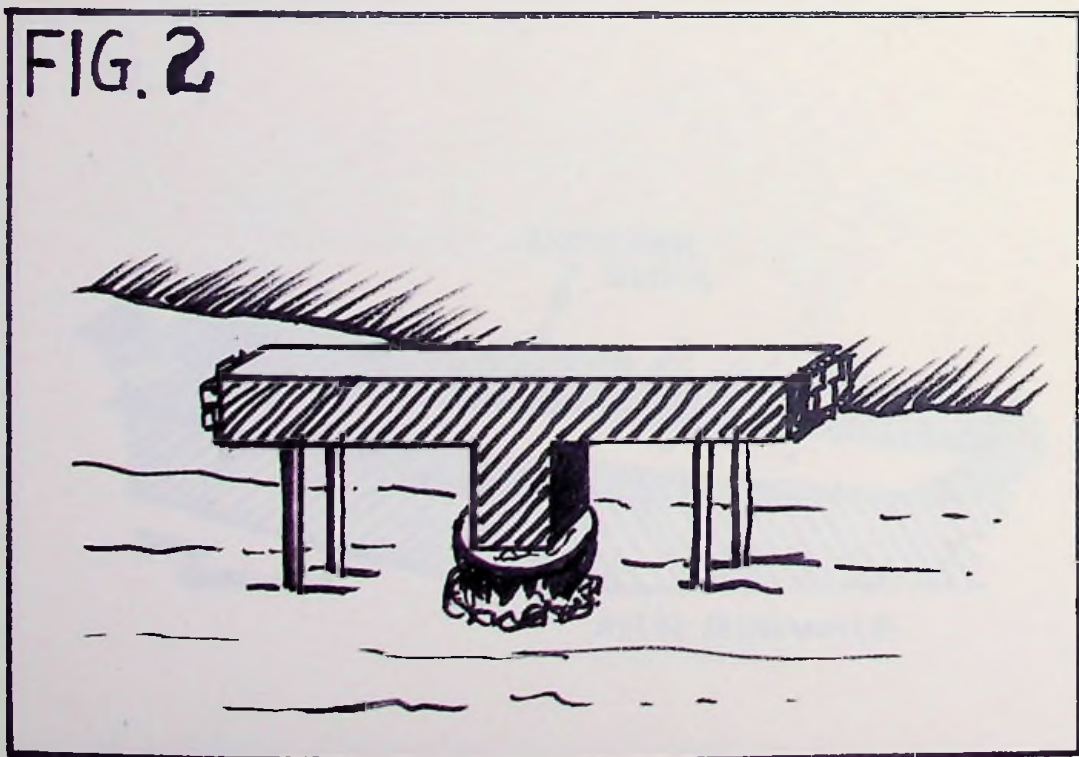


FIG. 3

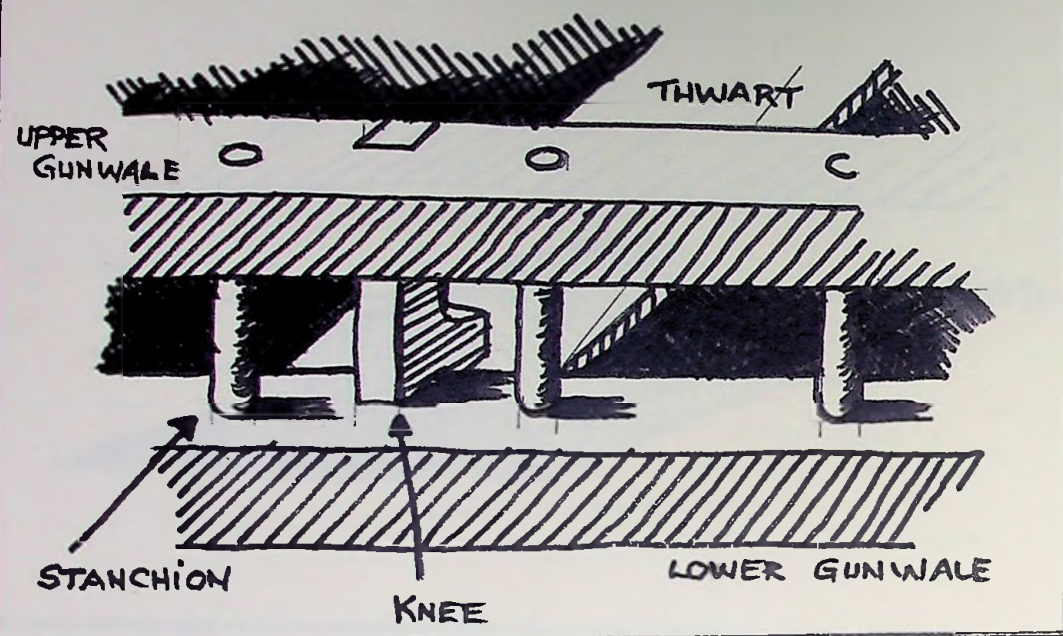


FIG. 4

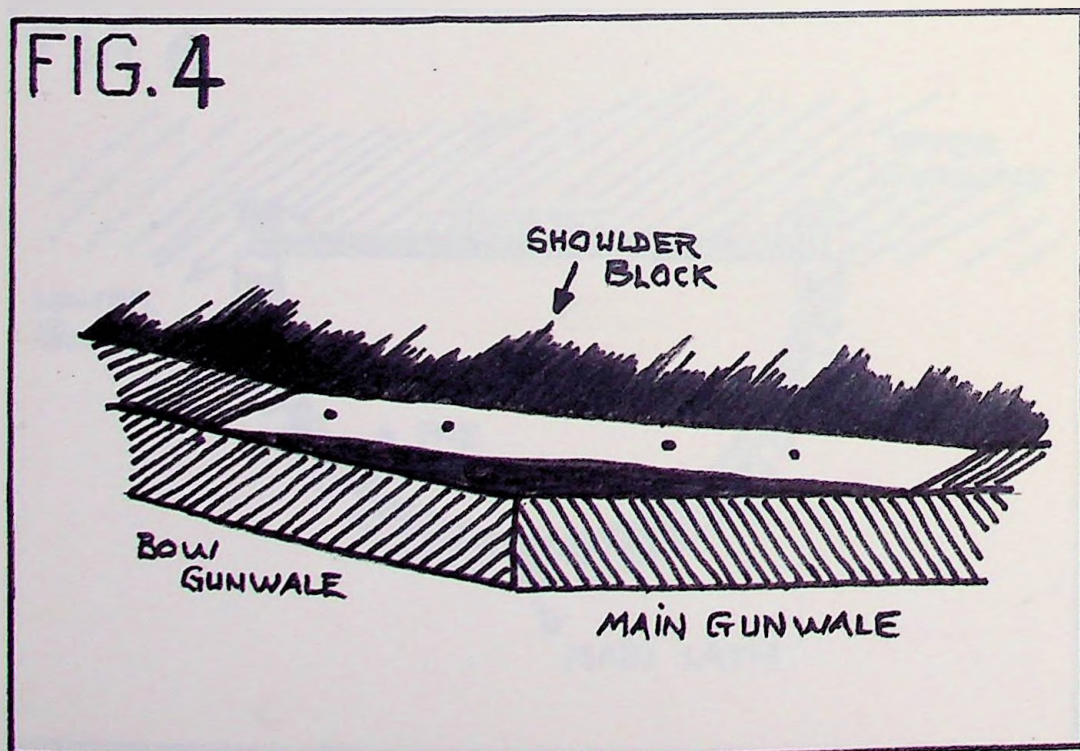


FIG. 5

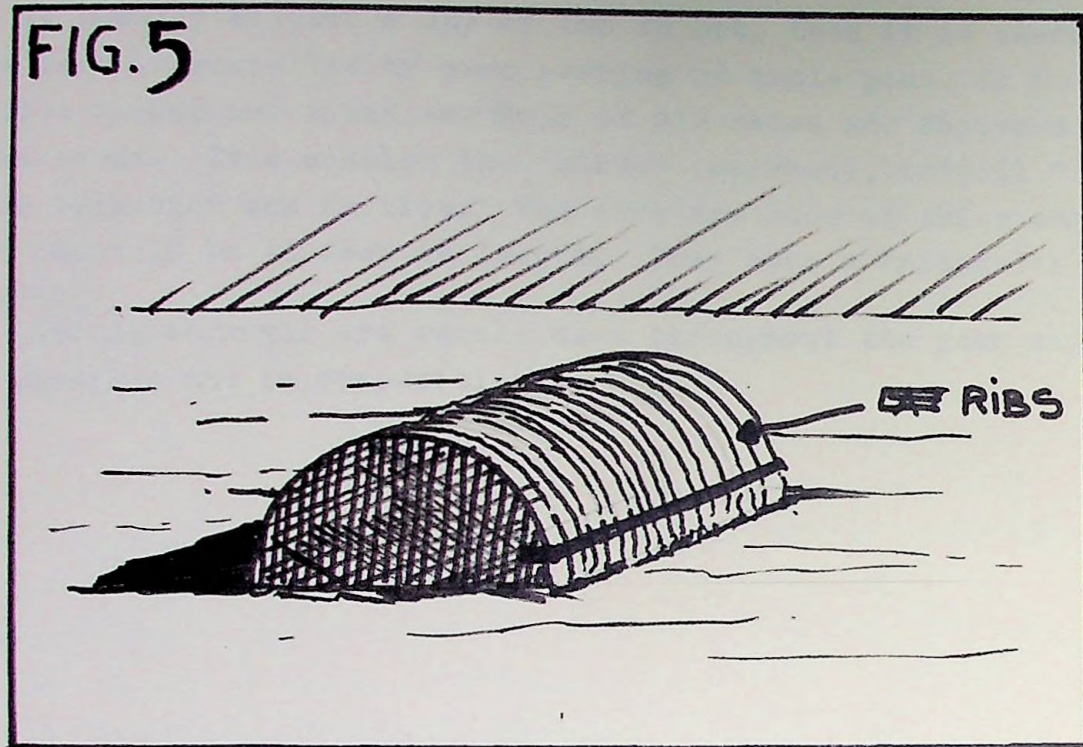
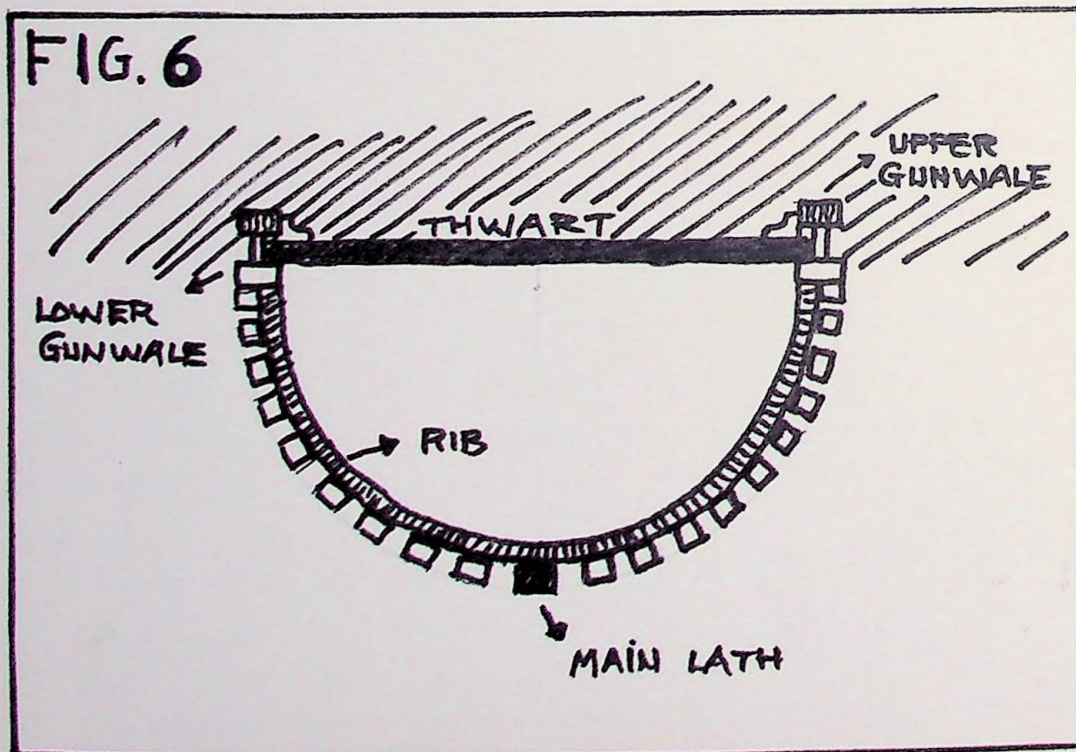


FIG. 6



$\frac{3}{4}$ inch felt nails. The same is done with each succeeding yard until the frame is completely covered. The outside is then tarried. It is usually allowed a day or two to set, then it is seaworthy. The boat is propelled by oars resting on thole pins. It is oared double handed and sometimes tops of old shoes are fastened to the foot rests. This enables the "hands" (oarsmen), to "pull " (row) more together and in time. The oars are made of white deal and are about 10 to 12 feet in length. They have a triangular shaped "bull".

Racing currachs are rarely used throughout the year except in practice and in competition.

CURRAGH RACING (REGATTAS) IN THE REGION
OF WEST KERRY -MAHAREES IN PARTICULAR.

About a hundred years ago, curraghs as they are known today were practically non-existent in West Kerry. Around 1850, some Clare families moved to Kerry and settled in Brandon (16 miles from Tralee). They brought with them the first curraghs which became known as "namhogs" or "canoes". It is said that the Hartneys' first curraghs were made with coverings of horse skin strips stitched together. The Hartneys, the Pendys and the Lynches were the curragh builders of the arrivals.

Later as the boats became more popular in use canvass was introduced as an easier and cheaper covering. Their use spread all over the Dingle Peninsula, as they ideally suited the needs of the people. The men became skilled oarsmen and it was only natural that the sport of curragh racing should develop. Regattas have been held annually in each port and fishing village on the Dingle Peninsula for over one hundred years.

There are many stories told as to the excitement generated by these regattas. One such story is that of the Brandon crew, led by John Pendy, who approached a Micheal Hartney, (skilled curragh builder) in order to borrow one of his racing curraghs to compete in the Dingle Regatta. They were refused and so they went at night and "spitited" it, from his yard.

They rowed round the Blasket Sound to Dingle and won the main event next day. The fact that his boat was first allayed the owners' temper and the story had a happy ending.

Another such story which was the most talked about in that area, was the regatta held in Brandon in 1919. At that time mackerel fishing was at its peak and there were over one hundred curraghs in Brandon alone. The Brandon crew were favourites. About twelve curraghs lined up for the main race, but owing to some confusion, the favourites did not begin with the rest of the competitors. At the first turn they were level with the others however, after being thirty lengths behind. After the second turn they succeeded in leaving the field behind and went on to win by half a length.

In Maharees the first regatta was held in 1904. During the early years it was common for the crews to row to the Brandon event to take part, and to return home in the boats. Nowadays the canoes (as they are known locally) are transported by trailer or on top of vans. Some of the early curraghs had sails and a special race was held for this class.

The event was then discontinued for a number of years but was revived again with a more varied program which included horse and bicycle racing across the sands. All of this was later dropped and the regatta as we know it today was begun again in 1965.

It is now held in June of every year and is a very popular event, both with competitors and spectators. The programme consists mainly of ten races, these would include one, two, three and four handed races with local and outside crews taking part. Of late both male and female competitors are included. The main event is the male four handed race. The course is marked by bouys or markers and the races are usually from about three hundred yards to three miles in distance. The races are begun with all boats lining up. The curraghs are numbered at the bow and stern, so as to distinguish the competitors. Women competitors are usually accompanied by men e.g. one woman and two men crews in a three handed race. Prizes consist mainly of trophies and cash, the races being sponsored by local and outside business people. The whole programme is run by the Maharees Regatta Committee which is an organized group of local people.

These regattas help keep alive a local tradition of curragh building which is fast disappearing. It is no longer solely an existence for coastal people to fish the seas, but rather an economic venture. Bigger boats are now being used. With Government investment (Bord Iascaigh Mhara) the volume of fish being taken from the sea has escalated. Owing to the fact that a four thwart curragh holds but four thousand mackerel approximately, the curragh has been outmoded and replaced by trawlers, carrying larger amounts. Foreign investors are taking advantage of the rich fishing grounds around the west coast of Ireland,

these being directly situated in the Atlantic Drift, containing a rich and varied catch. Fish processing plants may be observed nowadays on the coast and most probably employ curragh fishermen by descent.

Today conservation is dangerously hampered by the incredible quantities of fish being taken from the sea by large trawlers. The result is a prohibition of the natural order of reproduction.

FINAL NOTE.

As is common the old curragh builders today retain the secrets of the finer craftsmanship employed in the building of the curragh, as I have discovered through conversation with a particular curragh builder locally situated. To my mind pride inhibited the extent of the information recorded. However through younger curragh builders I was able to obtain the information aforestated.

It is ironic that with government investment in the fishing industry today, the curragh as a fishing vessel has practically died out.

In an article from "Canoeing in Britain" published in June 1969, the author's opinion on the curragh was that it was "sad to think of them sailing to extinction when they could be excellent pleasure crafts" In my opinion in a country like Ireland whose traditions are tourist orientated, the curragh could well be developed as a pleasure craft.

In the gathering of information for this thesis I have discovered that it would be extremely difficult for one to produce a concise explanation of the tradition of curragh building and all it entails. It is however possible to compile an informatory article on the materials, sizes and variations of the curragh. It is difficult though to relate here the personality of such a vessel as I have experienced locally.

From childhood I had assumed that curragh building and all other traditions in my locality were but everyday happenings. I have now however, gained a lot of appreciation and some understanding of the curragh.
