

THE GATHERING OF STONES, LOUGH BOORA PARKLANDS JUNE 20-24th 2013

In association with Bord na Mona (Lough Boora) at Sculpture in The Parklands, the DSWA Ireland's 'The Gathering of Stones' was an event where wallers/masons and from across Ireland and even further afield (Canada, USA, Austria, Germany and the UK) joined to build a stone 'gathering point' formed from two circular enclosures, a large diameter one encompassing a much smaller but taller inner one, reminiscent of Irish ring forts. The rings are divided into 4 sections commemorating each of the four Irish provinces with different stone types and styles of wall from each.

The North Wales Branch were invited to attend/contribute, here's the story of the North Welsh stones and an overview of the event.

Ffestiniog Railway Sleeper Stone

The Ffestiniog Railway started life as a gravity/horse drawn tramway built in the 1830s, to provide a transport route from the Slate quarries of Blaenau Ffestiniog to the port at Porthmadog, a distance of over 13 miles. It has many retaining walls, cuttings and embankments, including Cei Mawr, probably the tallest free standing dry stone wall in the world, just over 60 feet high and 100 yards long. The creation of the tramway was made possible largely through Irish investment.

The original tramway rails were secured to stone blocks, with around 4000 to a mile. When the tramway became a narrow gauge steam railway in the 1860s - the world's first narrow gauge railway built to haul over a longer distance than just short shunting. At this point much of the track-bed was widened and the a new rail/sleeper system introduced. Many of the stone blocks were incorporated into the new trackside walls. One of the original granite blocks has been donated to the Gathering of Stones by The Ffestiniog Railway.



Fred Howes, Chairman of Ffestiniog Railway Heritage Group at the Railway's Minffordd Yard alongside the granite sleeper stone donated to "The Gathering". Sleeper stone found in a wall repair undertaken by the Branch in the 1990s. Shots of Cei Mawr.

Breakwater Quarry Stone

Holyhead is the main port in North Wales and provides a direct link with Dublin via the Stena Line and Irish Ferries. At 1.7 miles in length, Holyhead breakwater is the longest in the UK. Begun in 1845 it took 28 years to complete and consumed over 7 million tonnes of stone quarried from nearby Holyhead Mountain. These quarries now form part of Breakwater Country Park.

The last blasted rockfall remains alongside one quarry face and a stone from alongside this has been donated to the gathering of Stones by Breakwater Country Park/Isle of Anglesey County Council with the permission of RSPB and NRW (Natural Resources Wales, previously the Countryside Council for Wales). Countryside Warden Gareth Evans says, "the Council's Countryside and AONB Service is always happy to support the Arts, and have commissioned public art, at Holyhead Breakwater Country Park and the Dingle Local Nature Reserve in Llangefni. Consequently we were pleased to help source stone for this exciting project".



THE GATHERING

The design shown below right (courtesy DSWA), has two circles reminiscent of an Irish ring fort, and is a monument to the people of Ireland and our dry stone heritage in the year of 'The Gathering' 2013'. It ties in with the theme of the gathering by bringing stone from the four corners of Ireland and indeed the world to assemble it into a sculpture.

Rockfall from the final blast. View of the Breakwater from the quarry. View of the breakwater from Holyhead Mountain. Extracting the Stone for The Gathering

The outer vallate (wall) is punctuated by 4 entrances. The consequent four arcs each represent a province of Ireland: Munster, Leinster, Ulster & Connacht.



The 4 day event saw the commencement of the project with much of the outer ring completed and work begun on the inner sanctuary which will eventually be 8 feet high, with an internal diameter of 3m (external 5m). The outer ring has a diameter of 18m.



Within the inner circle hand carved shields of the emblems of each province (60cm x 60 cm) are to be installed.



L to R
Hand carved 600x600mm shields: Leinster, Connacht, Munster, Ulster

Niche in inner wall under construction.

People brought stone from all over the country and quite a few places abroad. A lot of them were doing so to commemorate a loved one who had passed away while living abroad. Others wanted to add something to remember a relative who worked with stone or who had a love of stone building. Contributions from the public ran into the hundreds and continues to take place long after the event has ended. It will no doubt be an element of the sculpture which will continue indefinitely.

CENTREPIECE

The inner circle has a limestone outer wall (supplied by Mick Kelly, Roscommon), whilst the inside is being built with bands of stone from various areas. Local Cadamstown sandstone forms a lower band (within which the Ffestiniog sleeper stone has been incorporated), above this and forming the niches is Green Sandstone (supplied by Maher Stone in Stradbally Co. Laois). The bands above this will vary in thickness depending on the donated stone.

The central feature is made from 4 granite slabs blocks from the old Immigrant Docks near Battery Park in New York. Millions of emigrants walked over these stones after registering at Ellis Island, including nearly everyone from Ireland during the famine years and after. These stones seemed to really capture the public's imagination, with a constant stream of visitors throughout the four days having their photos taken standing on them. I (Sean Adcock) was responsible for setting the slabs (each weighing over ¾ tonne) to form a cross at the centre of the inner circle, initially I thought setting them a chore as they varied in size, but as the event progressed and I saw how much they meant to people and what they symbolised, I came to realise what a privilege it was to be asked to be responsible for such a key aspect of the project.

The slabs were donated by Bobby Watt a Scottish Stonemason based in Canada, and transported free of charge by Irish Shipping. Bobby a member of the stone Foundation, a raconteur with a fine singing voice tells the story of the stones in the video below. He also signs the poignant "Whispering Stones" a song he composed for the occasion, which brought a tear to many an eye when first played at "Stories and Stones" (more later) and reprised by Rónán Crehan at the conclusion of the 4 day event.



Positioning Battery Park Slab, courtesy Karl Kennedy**Slabs in place, courtesy Sunny Wieler**

THE CONCEPT

The bi-vallate (twin walled) enclosure reflects Ireland's built heritage. The ringfort is the most common archaeological site to be seen in the landscape. They hark back to a time when history and language were passed on verbally and became enigmatic structures with a good deal of superstition surrounding them and they were connected to the world of magic, superstitions that helped to preserve the ringforts on the landscape for fear of the wrath of the fairies.

The status of a ring fort is not only evident by its diameter but more significantly through the number of ditches it contains. Therefore, a bi-vallate enclosure would often be the seat of the local lord or the central focal place for a network of ring forts which formed a community.

The outer wall symbolizes the 4 provinces. Thus the Island of Ireland and all its people, with its many varying ways and vernacular styles, forms a comforting embrace around the 5th province. That fifth province once had a physical existence here in the Iron Age and was known as Breifne. However, the King of Breifne (Michael McMurtaigh) was driven from Ireland after attempting to unite the country under a single monarch. In addition in this structure the fifth province also represents the individual, creativity and imagination and the Diaspora.

The structure represents the country of Ireland and its people welcome home and embrace the people who left and never returned. The outer walls embrace the creative mind, the millions of souls and talents to have left our shores and spread their skills far and wide.

It becomes entirely appropriate that the 'Emigrant Stones' should be laid in cruciform shape at the centre of the sculpture embracing people from all corners of the world.

The 4 crests also will look inward to the centre point and in turn form a powerful focal point which is free from any division, a unified centre for everyone to be part of. The middle of the sculpture is the combination of all the elements surrounding it.

THE OUTER VALLATE

It was originally intended to use stone from the province in question to build a style associated with that province. Subsequent last minute loss of stone from West Cork, Kilkenny and North Tipperary meant that we had to reshuffle almost everything.

The Ulster wall is pure and pristine containing a mixture of Donegal stones - quartzite and sandstone. Donegal is unique in Ireland in that it is the only county on the island to contain a source of every stone type to be found here! The Donegal wall is a double wall with a vertical cope.



Ulster

The Connacht wall is a Feidin wall. A style commonly found in East & South Galway and the Aran Islands. The feidin is rarely seen outside Connacht, except in Clare and a small few examples elsewhere like Aherlow in South Tipperary. It is a combination wall similar in ways to the famous Galloway Dyke associated with Southwest Scotland. In the feidin the wall is divided into panels by vertical 'mother' stones, the smaller stones between these are known as 'children', whilst the larger capping stones are 'daddies' children.



Feidin

The stone used in the Connacht wall is actually from Leinster. The doubled panels were built using a mixture of stone from the Boora area. The blue limestone is from the parklands and the light grey limestone with the whitish and pale brown laminate is from Boora. The Mother stones are a mixture of Sandstones sourced at Cadamstown and Lough Boora as are the covers under the single wall. The brown sandstone is from Cadamstown and is a type of conglomerate with many large pebble inclusions. The whitish sandstone from the Boora bog has been bleached white by the peat and is slightly beige brown when split. The single wall is built from Cadamstown sandstone.



Leinster

The Leinster wall is a type commonly found throughout the entire Island of Ireland and indeed many parts of the world. It has many names or descriptions: a boulder

wall, a fieldstone wall, a not-to-axis-wall. The stones are not necessarily set to the horizontal, relying on contact between the irregular shaped stone forming irregular arcs for strength. The wall grows stronger as it is built and weight is added. Generally they don't have a regular cope or cover. All the stone in the Leinster wall came from the area around and within the Parklands, making it a Leinster wall using purely Offaly stone (Offaly is part of Leinster).

The Munster wall will be a single wedged wall where the stone is placed on edge. It has been started using Cadamstown sandstone, but we Tipperary sandstone and

slate may be added if this can be sourced. Originally it was conceived as a double wedged slate wall but the supplier pulled out 24 hours before the event. Wedged wall scan be found in many places throughout Ireland. In west Cork (where the slate was to come from) the wedged walls are commonly seen as retainers and pier walls. There are examples of freestanding single wedged walls to be seen in Clare and Kerry as well as a few places in South Tipperary and Waterford. Therefore it is a good example of an unusual but not unheard of Munster wall. The quartzite from the Holyhead breakwater quarry is set at the centre point of this wall in the first course.



Close of Play



Hats Off to US
Courtesy Sunny Weiler



MORE PHOTOS

North Wales Branch display tent

Sean makes a presentation at the associated "Stones and Stories" event



Setting the Breakwater Quarry stone.

Breakwater stone viewed from the inner circle.

Sean sets the sleeper stone

Sleeper stone in place



Photos 2,4,5 courtesy Sunny Wieler