

FESTIVALS, SHOES, MAPS AND BEER IN GALWAY, IRELAND

June 29, 2012 Declan Moore (Moore Group) Commercial Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2012, Excavation, Finds, Historical Archaeology Ale, Beer, Beer styles, Dancewear, Eyre Square, Footwear, Gale Ale, Galway, Galway City, Headford Co., http, Ireland, large electricity infrastructure project, Moore Group, National Museum, Natural Disaster, penal law era, Shoes, Volvo, west coast



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Moore Group is based in Galway, on Irelands rugged, windswept, wet west coast, and today marks the beginning of festival season in the City. So, despite the dreary weather, we're all in festive mood here. The Volvo Round the World Yacht Race is due to finish in the harbour over the weekend, the Galway Arts Festival follows the week of festivities around the Yacht Race and the famous Galway Races follow that. Then, in early August we're hosting our small boutique 'Archaeology of Beer' Festival in Headford, Co. Galway (Headfest). It's been described as Ireland most boutique, boutique festival. This year, due to a lack of funding, we've downsized the gig, so it'll be even more boutique!

This morning I've been focused on beer. I've been researching ancient recipes and brewing methods for a 'wild' beer. A wild beer is a beer which is fermented using windblown or other wild yeasts, and is something we've never really tried before. It could (and probably will) turn

out awful... We've brewed two beers so far. One, a bog myrtle (*Myrica Gale*) and malt ale with some yarrow flavouring (Gale Ale), the second a simple hopped ale (so that people can taste the difference between a modern hopped ale and an ancient non-hopped herbal 'gruit' ale). We've already tasted our 'Gale Ale' and, it's really nice, if I say so myself... We had separated it into three batches – one is a 'lighter' ale of about 6% ABV, the second is stronger and is around 8% ABV and the third is a really strong 9.5% ABV ale. We've one more beer to brew and I'm trying to work out a recipe for next weeks brewday. On Headfest day we'll be demonstrating our brewing in a replica fulacht fiadh using hot rocks to get our liquor to the right temperature. You can read more about our hot rock experiments on our [blog](#)...

Unfortunately beer doesn't pay the bills so we have other more mundane duties to perform today as well. I'm currently completing a constraints study on a large electricity infrastructure project. Essentially this entailed mapping and describing the existing, known, cultural heritage of the study area, using existing data sources and information. We've mapped all these data and today I have to review the mapping to ensure that it's correct. It sounds dull, but there are some interesting diversions. For instance, comparing the first edition OS Maps with the second editions gives a picture of a remarkably changed landscape which mirrors the economic history of the 19th and early 20th centuries in Ireland. Despite the intervening famine there was huge development in the West of Ireland, with the construction of roads, railway lines, bridges and the introduction, and eventual dissipation, of large demesnes and designed landscapes. Whereas the early maps (surveyed in the 1830s and 1840s) depict remote clusters of houses and small landholdings in many cases reachable only by tracks, by the 1890's or early 1900's these remote locations are served by roads and other services. Much of this growth in the latter part of the 19th century is down to the Napoleonic Wars when Ireland experienced a huge surge in economic circumstances (an early Celtic Tiger period) and the passing of the Land Acts in the latter part of the 19th century and the early 20th century which eventually dissipated the power of the Anglo-Irish landed gentry and created a large sector of small landowners throughout the country.

My colleague Billy, meanwhile, is busy preparing finds for deposition in the National Museum, cataloguing and boxing... He's currently looking at shoes.



A shoe from post medieval Galway

The shoe pieces (44 in all) were retrieved from the Market House excavation (for more on the excavation see [here](#)) during the course of the Eyre Square Re-enhancement Project in the middle of Galway City in 2004. Most of the fragments were retrieved from a rectangular test pit excavated across the centre of the site representing successive metallised surfaces and dump deposits pre-dating an 18th century building at the north end of Eyre Square. The majority of the pieces come from post-medieval contexts consisting largely of footwear fragments and off cuts. Shoes are fascinating (I'm serious)... Here's an excerpt from Billy's report:

"The shoe styles found share similar characteristics with comparative urban excavations in Cork and Waterford and more locally from Barrack lane, Galway. The most common shoe type of the medieval period was the turnshoe, made as the name suggests by stitching a wet and inside out leather upper to a sole and then turning it rightside out so that the sewing is protected. The upper would then be wrapped around the foot and secured by either a strap, latched or using a thong. This simple template evolved through time for utilitarian purposes or simply as fashion dictated. Heels were initially made by sewing stiffeners inside the shoe to prevent wearing.

From the sixteenth century onwards heels developed into a series of separate "lifts" ("built heel") stacked and pinned or sewed together. Similarly the upper changed from a simple

wraparound piece to an overshoe consisting of a 'vamp' or toe covering, quarters covering the inner and outer sides of the foot, the tongue, a piece of leather to the front placed between two sides of a tied opening and the back strap. Another common shoe feature was a welt (sometimes called rand) or strip of leather stitched along the lasting margin between the upper and the sole to protect the seam and make the shoe watertight. Common shoes of the second half of the eighteenth century were the heavy brogue and the knee length boot. The native brogue (after the Irish bróga, meaning shoe) was a low heeled, heavy shoe of un-tanned leather with laces along the instep and no tongue with small perforations on the toe puff and quarters. This hardwearing footwear was practically designed for country men as a shoe that would drain water and dry quickly due to the lack of a tongue, and not get stuck in the mud because of their laces above the ankle. Knee length boots were an English introduction and were more expensive and associated with the landed gentry, given the restrictive laws for horse ownership during the penal law era.

Concerning leather as a raw material, cow hide was generally used in the manufacture of most shoe soles, welts and binds – it being the strongest and most resilient of the available skins. For the uppers, calf, goat or sheep skin were the preferred choices for reasons of flexibility and comfort.”

See – I told you, Shoes are fascinating!

As archaeologists it's the ordinary things we find which inform our discourse with the past and which give me most satisfaction. The big finds and the big sites are, of course, part of the process, but it's the archaeology of the ordinary that keeps me interested – the shoes, the nails, the bottles and pot sherds, all of which tell us a story and fill in the gaps in our knowledge.