

# TRADITIONAL BOATS OF IRELAND PROJECT

## Ár mBáid Dúchais

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### Cartlannaí-Bailitheoir

Lárionad Uí Dhuilearga do Bhéaloideas na hÉireann  
agus Cnuasach Bhéaloideas, Éireann UCD.  
Áras Newman, Ollscoil na hÉireann, Baile Átha Cliath,  
Belfield, Baile Átha Cliath 4

**Dear Sir / Madam,**

We have just completed our **Traditional Boats of Ireland** book.

This book is the result of a combined effort by Irish people who are passionate about the rich diversity of traditional boats found throughout Ireland.

This book is a by-product of a loosely affiliated voluntary group of individuals with a shared realisation that Ireland's traditional boat types are rapidly disappearing. The purpose of the book is to raise awareness of the value and vulnerability of our maritime traditions.

We would be very pleased if you would consider featuring this book in your publication.

Should you wish to learn more about the project generally, please do not hesitate to write or phone.

Yours sincerely,

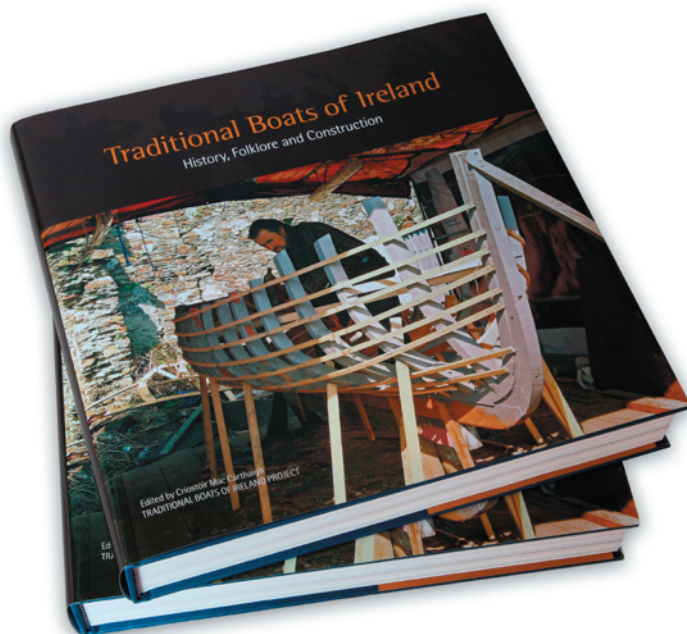
**Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh**

Editor Traditional Boats of Ireland

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# Traditional Boats of Ireland book Press Release



## Traditional Boats of Ireland: History, Folklore and Construction Ár mBáid Dúchais

Edited by Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh  
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Traditional Boats of Ireland Project  
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History, Folklore and Construction  
[www.tradboats.ie](http://www.tradboats.ie)

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This book has its origins in a conversation at the 1994 Glandore Classic Boat Regatta between three boat-loving engineers – Donal Lynch, Paddy Barry and Hal Sisk – and Bernard Cadoret, editor of a pioneering study of Breton boats. Each knew that Ireland's stock of indigenous boats, the Kerry naomhóg (curach) or the snub-nosed Waterford prong, for example, was rapidly shrinking while others, such as the Boyne curach, used for netting salmon until the 1960s, appeared to have become extinct. Much of the history and lore of these boats had already been lost and it seemed likely that any remaining diversity and distinctiveness would disappear under the tides of technological innovation. A project committee was formed with Traditional Boats of Ireland as a working title and it agreed that a study of Irish boats, comparable to that by Cadoret on those of Brittany, should be undertaken. In the years that followed that initial conversation the ambition of the project grew as its founders came to grips with the vastness and complexity of their subject; to date, sixty distinctive boat types have been identified, studied and recorded. When they flagged the baton was picked up by Criostoir Mac Carthaigh as editor with Donal MacPolin as assistant. Without their dedication, patience and persistence over many years the project would have foundered. The working title has endured, its website, [www.tradboats.ie](http://www.tradboats.ie), now brings news of its work to a wide audience and the project has found a berth and vital logistical support at the UCD Delargy Centre for Irish Folklore. A team that includes professional historians and folklorists, linguists and archaeologists, curators and archivists, fishermen, boat builders and owners was mobilised to record not just the physical details of individual boat types but their histories as well. This magnificent book is the result of that collaboration.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the extent of their achievement. Four introductory essays examine the history and oral traditions of boats and boatmen and of the cultural and environmental factors that influenced the construction and use of various boat types. Then follows a series of case studies that deal with specific examples of boat history, construction and use, conveniently arranged by each of the north, south, east and west coastal regions. Thus the section on the east coast contains essays on the Rosslare herring cots; the Arklow yawl; the hobbler, skiffs and pilots of Dublin Bay; the long-line fishermen of Howth; the traditional boats of the Boyne estuary and the boats of Dundalk Bay. A section on inland waterways includes case studies of the Blackwater, Suir, Nore, Barrow and Slaney cots; the Slaney gabbard or sailing cot; the flat-bottomed turf boats of the Midlands and the rush-bundle rafts of the Shannon and Suck, perhaps the simplest and most archaic of the boats dealt with in the book. A section of six essays is devoted to 'skin' boats, principally the curachs of Kerry, Clare, Connaught, Donegal and the Boyne. Glossaries of nautical terms, many of them originating in Latin, Old Norse and in various English dialects, hint at the dynamics of a tradition that remains open to

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the benefits of borrowing from other cultures. An important appendix reproducing the lines and construction plans of fourteen distinct types is included. In all, the book has a total of fifty-five essays, the work of thirty-six individual authors. Notwithstanding this magnificent sweep, the editor is quick to point out that this is just a first stage and that some types of vernacular boat remain unrecorded and unpublished. Hopefully, a future book will include the large flat-bottomed rafts used to take cattle on and off the islands of the Erne, the vanished lighters of the Tyrone navigation and the eel and sand boats of Lough Neagh.

A major strength of this book is its visual material. The lines and construction plans of individual boats meticulously recorded and drawn by Michael Tyrrell, Harry Madill, Ted O'Driscoll and Holger Lönze are surely the vital heart of any project of this type. Donal MacPolin's meticulous sketches record complex construction details with greater clarity than most photographs and they capture too the personality of individual boats. Simpler, though no less valuable, are the sketches and notes by folklore and material culture collectors of the 1930s and 40s such as James Hornell and Ciarán Ó Síocháin that pay eloquent tribute to those pioneering heritage projects. The poignant inscription on Bill Higgins's beautiful sketch of the last 'hulk' leaving Youghal – 'Sean-bhád iascaireachta na Rinne agus Cé an Bhlaist á fhágaint aice 1931; b'shin deire leo!' – might have provided a rallying call to those who continue the work of collecting, preserving and publishing. William Lawrence's majestic photographs and the more modest snapshots by long-gone holidaymakers are equally pressed to yield up details of all-but-forgotten craft. All these images capture the information that will facilitate, if necessary, future boatbuilding projects.

The results of this unique project have been brought together and skilfully edited by Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh, Archivist at the UCD Delargy Centre for Irish Folklore, assisted by Donal MacPolin (an illustrator and maritime history researcher) and supported by a very able team of language and technical editors. Their work will be cherished by boatowners and sailors and by anyone with an interest in the rivers, lakes or seas of Ireland. It will be an essential work of reference for teachers and researchers and it should find a place in every school library. It is a good example of the benefits that can flow from collaborative research, particularly where painstaking and extensive fieldwork is needed. Traditional Boats of Ireland must be congratulated on bringing this intricate publishing project to completion and for making it available at a price that belies its encyclopaedic range, its graceful design – by Copper Reed Studio – and the generosity of its production values.

**John Logan**

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[www.tradboats.ie](http://www.tradboats.ie)