

# An Ancient Paddle from near Knocknagashel

*Griffin Murray*

In January 2009, Mr Mortimer O'Donoghue contacted Kerry County Museum on the advice of Ms Marie O'Sullivan of this society, which led to the donation of a wooden artefact to the museum. The object (KCM 2009:1) had been found around 1988 by Mr David O'Connor approximately 1m below the surface on Mr O'Donoghue's strip of bog in the townland of Lackbrooder, parish of Ballincuslane, barony of Trughanacmy, Co. Kerry, OS Sheet No. 32. Unfortunately, it was broken at the time of its discovery, but was said to have been originally about three feet long and featured a handle. It remained in Mr O'Donoghue's possession and was kept by him in a shed in his farmyard. In the intervening years the handle was lost and the remaining portion of the object dried out and was affected by woodworm, so that by the time it reached the museum it survived in poor condition. Nevertheless, enough of it remained to allow it to be identified as a small paddle, with the surviving element being the blade section. It is here represented in a line drawing by Ms Sarah-Jane Hogan (Fig. 1). The find was treated for woodworm by freezing, which took place in Muckross House under the supervision of Ms Patricia O'Hare, and I would like to thank her, as well as Dr Paul Mullarkey of the National Museum of Ireland, for their help and advice regarding its treatment.

## **Description**

The maximum dimensions of the surviving portion of the paddle are: 345mm long, 72.5mm wide and 33.5mm thick. Made from a split stem, this worked piece of wood, which has been identified as hazel (*Corylus avellana L.*) by Ms Sandra McKeown, forms a tapering blade. While both faces of the blade are convex, one face is much more curved than the other, giving it an approximately plano-convex profile. The narrow sides of the blade are parallel, and it is straight along its length, with the exception of a noticeable kink about two-thirds of the way up, where there is a knot running transversely through the timber. There is a small section of what appears to be bark, measuring approximately 20mm x 10mm, adhering to the timber above the knot on the flatter, or front, face of the blade. On the same face, the wood is badly splintered above the



Fig. 1: Line drawing of paddle by Sarah-Jane Hogan.

knot as a result of the break. On the more convex face, or back, there are two faint, light-coloured bands, approximately 20mm wide and 30mm apart, running across its upper section. On the lower section, about a third of the way up, there are two incised marks 12mm long forming a V shape, which appear to be ancient. Around 25mm above this, is an area of modern abrasion measuring 22mm by 13mm. The paddle blade has between 7 and 9 woodworm holes on each side, and the wood is also cracked in a number of places. There are two major vertical cracks that run through the thickness of the wood, one at the broken end measuring approximately 70mm in length and another at the tapered end measuring approximately 50mm long. The tip of the blade is also damaged, and a large section measuring approximately 30mm x 20mm is missing from one side of it.

### Discussion

There are two other recorded ancient paddle finds from bogs in Co. Kerry, both of which are in the National Museum of Ireland collections. One is from the townland of Sussa, parish of Prior, barony of Iveragh, OS Sheet No. 88 (NMI1971:958), while the other is from the townland of Ballyegan, parish of Galey, barony of Iraghticonnor, OS Sheet No. 10 (NMI1935:154). However, neither of these finds resembles that from Lackbrooder. On the other hand, the paddle blade is very similar to an example of unknown provenance in the NMI (3174:WK321) and is also similar to a number of river and crannóg finds from Co. Antrim, notably those from Loughlynch (NMI3149:WK296, R352), Toome (NMI2679:W1, R1627, 3172:WK319), Gortrichey near Portglenone (NMI1938:284), and two examples from Lough Ravel (NMI1903:257 & 8). These paddles were all probably used for small boats and canoes, and it is notable that an oak log-boat was also discovered at Lough Ravel crannóg (Wood-Martin 1886, 163).

While the official name for the townland is Lackbrooder, as recorded by John O'Donovan in the 19th century (Ordnance Survey Name Book for Co. Kerry, p. 158), he noted that the inhabitants of the area called it "Laghtfoodther", as it is still called today. O'Donovan gives its Irish version as Leac Bhrúadair or Broder's flagstone, but its variance with the local pronunciation is notable. Mr Mortimer O'Donoghue felt that the two faint light-coloured bands that run across the paddle blade were an applied pigment, and these may have been more obvious at the time of discovery. For now, the age of the find remains unknown, although radiocarbon dating may resolve this at a future date. Despite its

condition, the paddle is a very welcome addition to the small group of ancient paddles from Co. Kerry.

### **Bibliography**

Wood-Martin, W.G. *The Lake Dwellings of Ireland: or Ancient Lacustrine Habitations of Erin, Commonly Called Crannogs.* Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co., 1886.

### **Note about Author**

Griffin Murray is the collections and documentation officer at Kerry County Museum. He was awarded a PhD in archaeology from University College Cork in 2007.