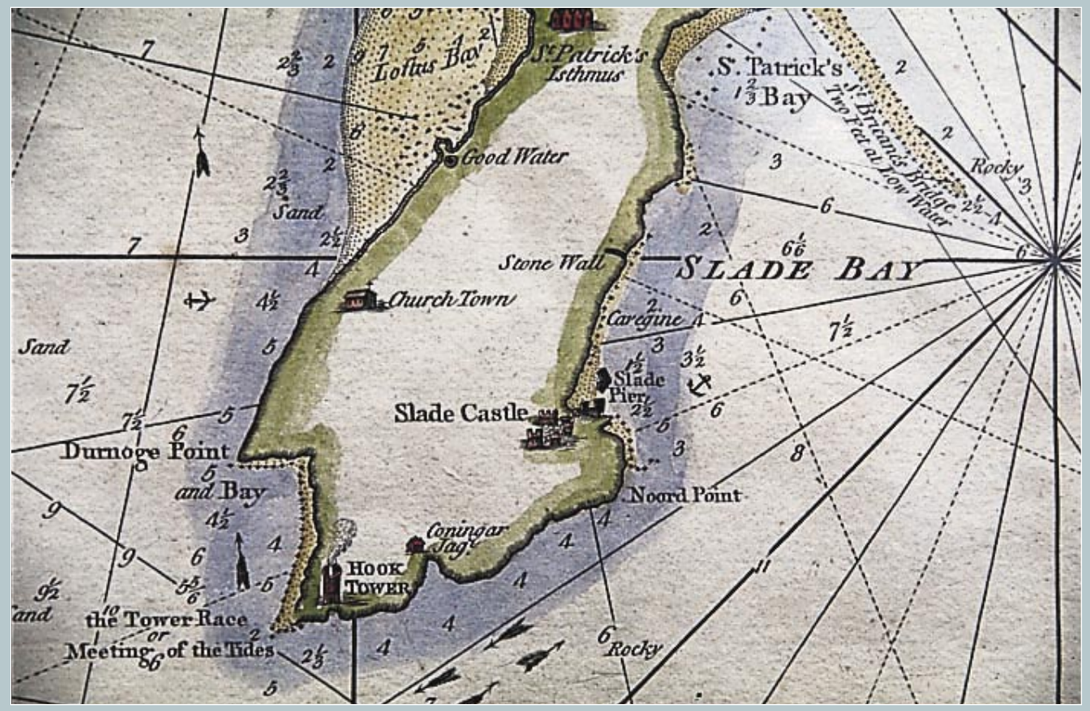


Historic map (1794) of Hook Head - note plume of smoke from lighthouse.

Recording our Maritime Heritage

Until the late twentieth century people from the Hook frequently walked on the rocks along the shore. Some, out of habit, looked for 'wreck' (material from ship wrecks washed up on shore) or searched the crab-holes. Others enjoyed walking by the sea in summer or winter. Many continued to be familiar with the place-names that are mentioned here, and more besides. However, as the economic necessity to interact with the seashore declined and the coastal zone no longer played a part in everyday life, the need for an intricate naming system diminished.

Today people still walk the shore, many of them visitors to the peninsula. However the traditional names of the rocks and other coastal features are no longer known as intimately as in former years. As a result, some of the rich tapestry of place-names which evolved over the centuries is in danger of being lost and forgotten. These names deserve to be recorded as they represent an irreplaceable cultural and social testament to past generations.

Hook Lighthouse

Hook Lighthouse is one of the oldest intact, operational lighthouses in the world. Following the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland, William Marshal, earl of Pembroke and lord of Leinster, built the Tower of Hook as a light tower and landmark to guide shipping to his port of New Ross, founded in the early thirteenth century on the River Barrow. According to tradition, monks from a nearby monastery, who were installed as the first lightkeepers, had maintained a warning beacon on the rocky peninsula for centuries. The beacon consisted of a fire until 1791 when a lamp burning whale oil was installed. Following automation in 1996, the complex was made available by the Commissioners of Irish Lights to be operated as a Visitors' Centre, with guided tours of the medieval tower.

FURTHER INFORMATION

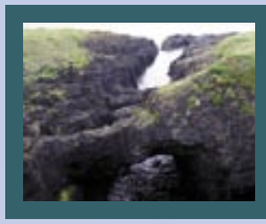
Billy Colfer, The Hook Peninsula (Cork University Press, 2004)

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

Kilkenny, Ireland. Telephone: +353 56 7770777. Fax: +353 56 7770788. E-mail: mail@heritagecouncil.com

Cill Chainnigh, Éire. Teileafón: +353 56 7770777. Faics: +353 56 7770788. E-mail: mail@heritagecouncil.com

www.heritagecouncil.ie



The Hook, County Wexford

The Maritime Heritage of a Coastal Community

The medieval tower of Hook is one of the oldest lighthouses in the world.

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
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Maritime traditions and place names of The Hook

The Hook

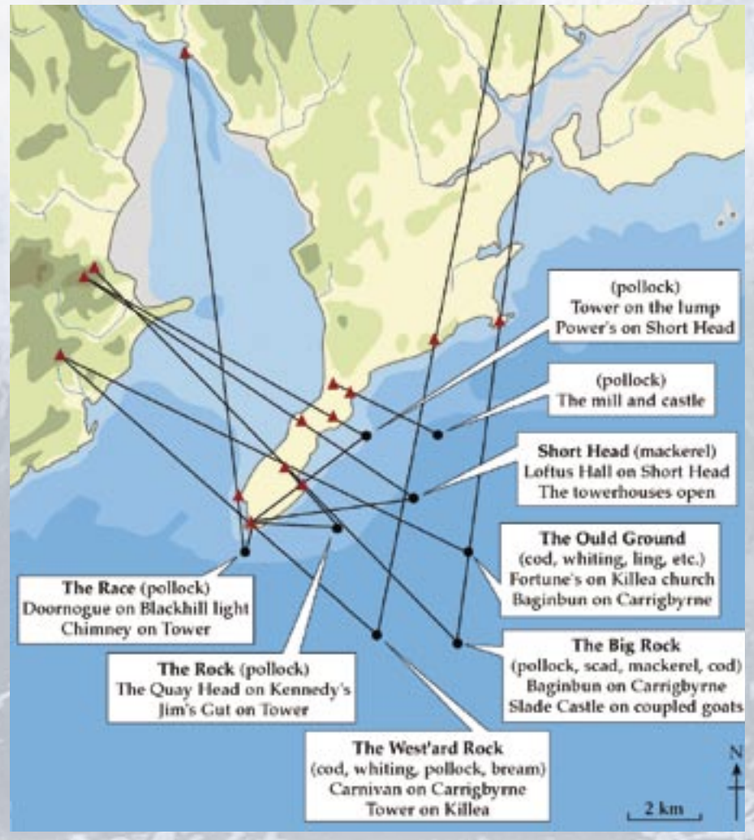
The long, narrow point of Hook (an old English word meaning a promontory almost surrounded by the sea), located in south-west county Wexford, forms the eastern shore of Waterford Harbour. Because of its peninsular nature, the sea dominated everyday life. Fishing, both sea and shore-based, was an essential activity for food and profit, as was harvesting of seaweed and shellfish from the shoreline. Ships arriving at the ports offered casual work to day labourers.

The importance of the seashore to the community was reflected in the complicated system of coastal place-names which evolved over the years. Many of these were in Irish, an indication that their origins go back at least to the mid-eighteenth century when Irish was still spoken in the region. These place-names, now in danger of being lost, contain considerable information of a social and cultural nature.

Johnny's Road- quarried through solid rock at Slade. The roadway allowed easy access to the beach for harvesting of seaweed, which was used as a fertilizer.

Bárnachs (limpets) were removed from the rocks with an implement called a scian trá (a strand knife). (Patricia Byrne)

Seagulls, by feeding on the waste produced by fishing activities, play a role in the maintenance of a clean maritime and coastal environment.



Fishermen used natural and man-made features in the landscape as co-ordinates or 'marks', to create a micro-navigation system which gave them a mental map of their movements on the sea.

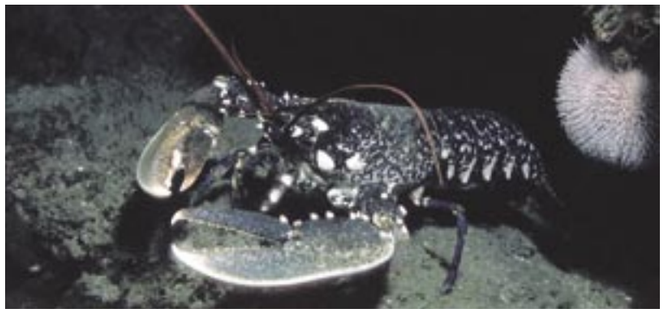
Lobster pots were made to a traditional design using willow, timber, netting or any other suitable material. The 'neck' was protected by a 'trigger' which allowed the lobster to enter but not to leave.

Sea Fishing

The skills and crafts connected with fishing were widely practiced. The tradition of building small boats covered with tarred canvas, known as 'punts', survived until recent times. Men rowed long distances to fish the 'marks' which had been discovered over the years, and to set lobster pots made from pliable willow branches (sallies). Boats were kept at Slade and at Bá Bheg (Little Bay) in Churchtown, as they are at the present time. The 'marks', identified by using natural and man-made features in the landscape as co-ordinates, allowed fishermen to create a micro-navigation system which gave them a mental map of their movements on the sea. This maritime geography included a nomenclature for different parts of the sea, particularly areas where certain species of fish could be caught.

These names, which sometimes referred to prominent landmarks or to underwater features, included The Lump, The Lock, The Old Grounds, The Big Rock, The Race, Jim's Gut, The West'ard Ground and Short Head. Fish were also caught in the food-rich 'scarf' created by the meeting of two currents at the well-defined meeting of river and sea off the point of Hook.

Tommy Murphy of Churchtown was the last builder of 'punts' in the Hook. Contstructed of light timber and covered with tarred canvas, these small boats were rowed long distances by men who fished with hand-lines and lobster pots.



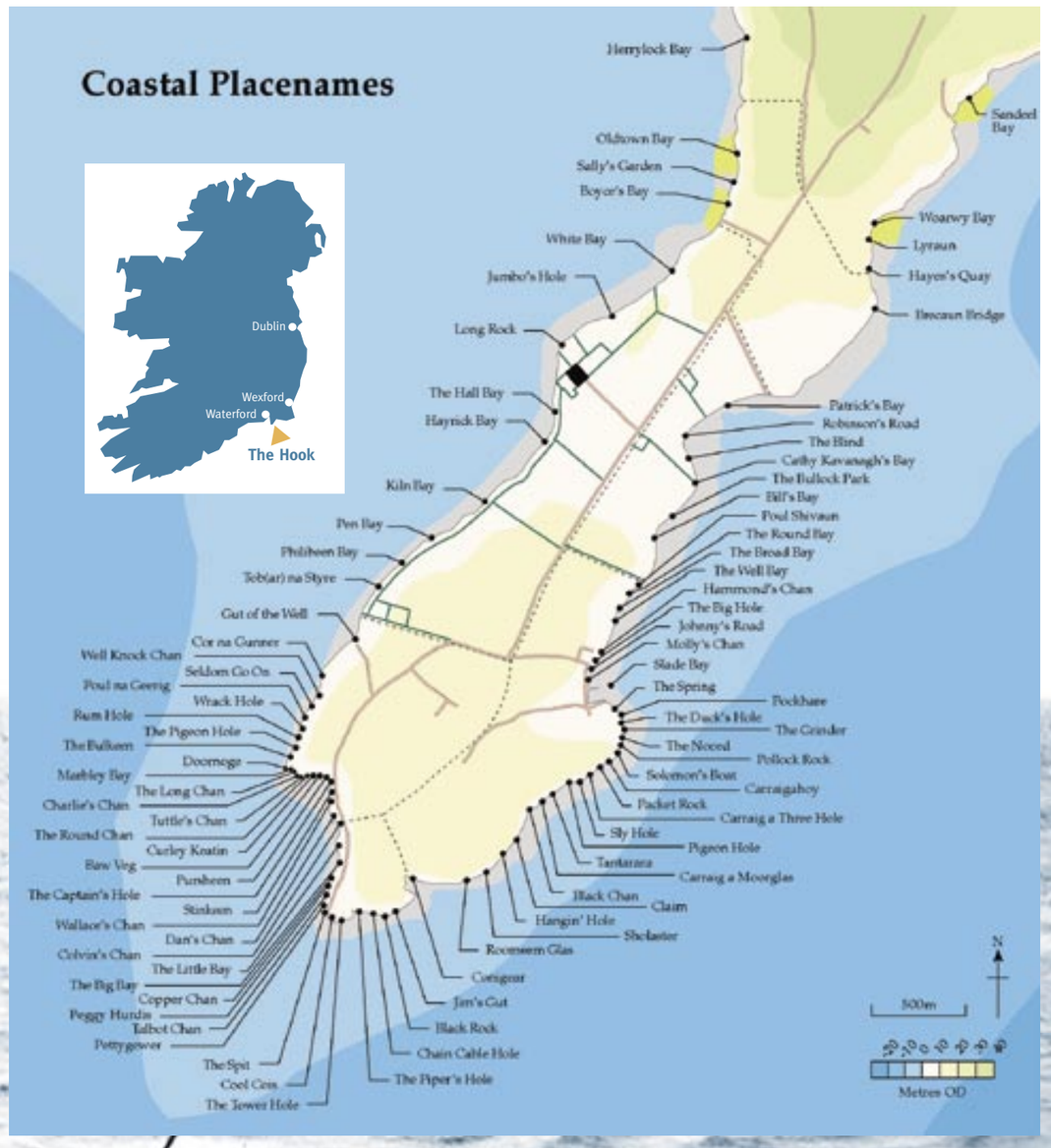
Lobsters have a scavenging diet and can defend themselves with powerful pincers. Caves, crevices and holes provide suitable habitats for lobsters around the coast of Ireland. (BioMar)

The Maritime Heritage of The Hook

Hobblers and joulters

Apart from fishing, other traditional occupations on the Hook peninsula depended on the sea. Hardy individuals, known as hobblers, competed for work on ships while they were in port. Enduring considerable hardship they slept overnight in their small boats. Fish-buyers, known as 'joulters', were a familiar sight in the small harbours around the peninsula. The fishermen depended on these individuals to buy their daily catch of mackerel, pollock or cod. Joulters usually sold the fish from door to door in the adjacent hinterland, but some sold from stalls on the quay of Ross.

Pollock. (BioMar)



The value of the seashore as a communal resource in the Hook led to the creation of an intricate system of coastal place names of complex origin, many of them Irish. As an intimate knowledge of the seashore is no longer necessary, the names are becoming irrelevant and could eventually be forgotten.

The Seashore

The seashore between the high-water and low-water marks, known as the strand, was also an important food resource, with most of the gathering being done by women. Bárnachs (limpets) and peehauns (piothán: periwinkle) were collected as food for humans and ducks. Bárnachs were removed from the rocks with an implement called a scian trá (a strand knife). Crabs were found in 'crab holes,' which could be searched at low tide. Dilisk (duileasc), an edible seaweed, was also collected to supplement a diet of fish and potatoes. Carrigeen moss was gathered as a cash crop. An early summer storm was welcomed, at least by farmers, as it brought the first crop of seaweed (called woar) on to the beaches, where it was collected for use as a fertiliser. Wreck-hunting also played an important part in the local economy. It was the principal source of timber for building and furniture, as well as firewood.

Seaweed, locally known as 'woar', tossed up on the shore by stormy seas.

Ascophyllum nodosum or Egg wrack- a seaweed common on sheltered rocky shores. (Patricia Byrne)

Shore fishing

Although fish was a basic element of diet, only the lucky few had access to boats. However, those without boats also availed of the huge numbers of fish that shoaled close to the shore in late summer and early autumn. Using home-made rods and lures, mackerel and pollock were expertly caught in great numbers from the rocks, and were preserved for winter consumption. Most were salted in wooden barrels and some were split open and dried, usually by exposing them to the sun on a flat roof or by hanging in the chimney to be smoked. A popular lure was the 'goat-hair', made by tying a wisp of white goat-hair to a hook. Goat-skin was used to make an eel-like lure called a 'torgan.' The use of a long rod was commonplace at the Hook until the 1950s, when fish stocks began to dwindle.

Until the 1950s locals fished from the rocks using a 'great long rod' (mentioned by Trotter in 1812) and home made lures. Mackerel and Pollock, the principle species caught, were salted or dried for winter use.

A German trawler wrecked in1967 after she was driven onto the rocks at Doornogue Point in Waterford Harbour.

Coastal place names

Until the late twentieth century, every rock and inlet around the Hook was identified by a very precise naming system. This method of identification was essential for the local community as the seashore made a vital contribution to everyday life. This intensive exploitation of the seashore resulted in the evolution of a sophisticated naming system which allowed any location on the coast to be instantly identified.

Name associations

Most of the coastal names are concentrated in the southern region of the Hook, where the majority of the population (525 people in 1841; about 120 at present) lived. These names are a mixture of Irish and English; the Irish word carraig (a rock) occurs frequently and the channels in between are referred to as 'guts', 'chans' or 'holes'. Most of these local place-names have never been recorded and for the purposes of this leaflet are spelled phonetically.

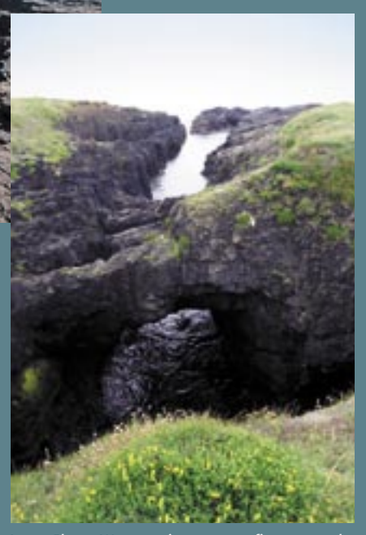
Over the centuries the names of many local people were associated with coastal features. Some of these are reminders of a time when quarrying was engaged in on a large scale, to supply rock for the many limekilns in the district. Who was the Johnny who quarried Johnny's Road out of solid rock, or the Charlie who gave his name to Charlie's Chan? Other names are more mysterious. Is there a hint of Viking origin in the name Sholaster? Who was the Solomon whose boat was wrecked at Solomon's Boat? Who was the piper who made the rocks echo to his music at Piper's Hole near the lighthouse?

Other place names refer to divergent activities; Tobar na Staighre (Well of the steps), Hayrick Bay, Conigear (a rabbit warren), Kiln Bay and Poll na gCaoraigh (a pool where sheep were washed). Some names can be deceptive; Carraig Ahoy was originally Carraig an Aith (Limekiln Rock) and not a place from which boats were hailed.

Solomon's Boat- a sea arch on the east coast of the Hook.

Descriptive names

Many names are descriptive and indicate the shape and appearance of the places they refer to. Baw Bheg (Little Bay) describes exactly the sheltered bay where boats were kept on the Churchtown side of the headland. Other names include Black Chan, The Round Bay and Carraig-a-three-hole. Cool Cois (the back of the foot) aptly describes a small 'chan' near the point of the headland and Seldom-go-on is the name of a rock accessible only at low spring tide.



Long Chan. Wave action creates fissures and clefts (known locally as 'chans' or 'guts') by removing softer material in faults in the bedrock.

Smugglers, pirates and shipwrecks

The origins of the names Petiegewer, Tantarara and Pockhair will always be obscure. Others have an air of mystery and romance about them. Did smugglers land their illicit cargoes at Rum Hole? Were they hanged at Hanging Hole? Cor na Gunner, Doornogue, Pursheen and The Blind have an intriguing ring to them. Wrack Hole, Chain cable Hole and Packet Rock were probably the sites of shipwrecks. Dollar Bay was the landing place of four Irish pirates who robbed Spanish dollars from a brig *The Earl of Sandwich* before scuppering the ship. Later arrested and hanged for their crime, their skeletons hung in gibbets on Dalkey Island, Co. Dublin, as a warning to potential pirates.

An initiative of The Heritage Council.
Text by Billy Colfer. All maps and photos credited to Billy Colfer, *The Hook Peninsula* (Cork University Press, 2004), unless otherwise stated.

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

Kilkenny, Ireland. Telephone: +353 56 7770777. Fax: +353 56 7770788. E-mail: mail@heritagecouncil.com
Cill Chainnigh, Éire. Teileafón: +353 56 7770777. Faics: +353 56 7770788. E-mail: mail@heritagecouncil.com
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