



THE FERNS FIELD SCHOOL: DISCOVERING AIDAN'S MONASTERY, AN INTENSIVE BIOARCHAEOLOGY PROGRAM COUNTY WEXFORD, IRELAND

Course ID: TBA

June 14–July 11, 2020

Academic Credits: 8 Semester Credit Units (Equivalent to 12 Quarter Units)

School of Record: Connecticut College

DIRECTORS:

Dr Linda Lynch, Irish Archaeology Field School (lindalynch1@eircom.net)

Dr Denis Shine, Irish Archaeology Field School (denis.shine@iafs.ie)



INTRODUCTION

The Ferns Field School provides a unique, hands-on opportunity for students to excavate the buried remains of both St Aidan's c. 7th century monastery and a 12th century Augustinian Abbey in the town of Ferns, County Wexford, Ireland. This site is a multi-period complex, originally founded by St Aidan at the turn of the 7th century, which also contains Early Medieval crosses and cross slabs, the twelfth century Augustinian Abbey (Mary's Abbey), and thirteenth century medieval cathedral (Edan's Cathedral) within its wider confines.

While this is the first season of excavations, it is anticipated that human remains from both the Early Medieval monastery and later 12th century abbey will be exposed during excavations. The burial practices at the site are presumed to speak to the customs and histories of their times, from an Early Medieval cemetery, through its High Medieval usage, and latterly the change in the official state religion and into a time of proscription. During this latter period the Abbey was suppressed in 1538, but was still described as a church and belfry, dormitory, chapterhouse, hall, and other buildings with c. 600 acres and other interests. Long after this time, and up to the present day, the wider site continued as a place of worship and burial focused on St Edan's Cathedral (which was remodelled in the 19th century as a *Church of Ireland* structure).

This project focuses on the remains of the monastery and abbey and has three primary components: excavation of the abbey buildings, excavation of the early monastery, and bioarchaeology. Excavation of the abbey buildings aims to determine their scope and layout as well as the associated infrastructure. A clearer understanding of how the physical structure of the Abbey changed over time will help illuminate:

- the relationship between the friary and its founder, Diarmuid McMurrugh (King of Leinster), and its relationship with the town and community; and
- the form of the Abbey through time, specifically the scale and number of buildings, which is one of a small number of High Medieval native Irish monastic orders, that pre-date the coming of the Anglo-Normans

The goals of the excavation of the Early Medieval Monastery are:

- understand the date, form and scale of the c. 7th century monastery's enclosure; and
- understand the form of early monastery through time, specifically the scale and number of structures, field divisions, industrial areas, *etcetera*.

The goals of the bioarchaeological research are:

- to describe the nature of mortuary practice throughout the life use of the site as a burial ground for Early Medieval to much later times; and
- to determine the date range and characteristics of the burials, including the biological profile of the interred individuals

By ascertaining who was buried at St Aidan's Monastery and Marys Abbey, where they were buried and when, the bioarchaeological research will inform our understanding of the long-term relationship between the local townspeople and the abbey.

ACADEMIC CREDIT UNITS & TRANSCRIPTS

Credit Units: Attending students will be awarded 8 semester credit units (equivalent to 12 quarter credit units) through our academic partner, Connecticut College. Connecticut College is a private, highly ranked liberal arts institution with a deep commitment to undergraduate education. Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school (see grading assessment and matrix). This field school provides a minimum of 160 direct instructional hours. Students are encouraged to discuss the transferability of credit units with faculty and registrars at their home institution prior to attending this field school.

Transcripts: An official copy of transcripts will be mailed to the permanent address listed by students on their online application. One more transcript may be sent to the student home institution at no cost. Additional transcripts may be ordered at any time through the National Student Clearinghouse: <http://bit.ly/2hvurkl>.

PREREQUISITES

There are no academic prerequisites. This program is hands-on, experiential learning and students will learn how to conduct archaeological research in a live field environment. What is required is enthusiasm, an open mind and a readiness to 'give it a go'.

DISCLAIMER – PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

Our primary concern is with education. Traveling and conducting field research involves risk. Students interested in participating in any IFR program must weigh whether the potential risk is worth the value of education provided. While risk is inherent in everything we do, we take risk seriously. The IFR engages in intensive review of each field school location prior to approval. Once a program is accepted, the IFR reviews each program annually to make sure it complies with all our standards and policies, including student safety.

The IFR does not provide trip or travel cancellation insurance. We encourage students to explore such insurance on their own as it may be purchased at affordable prices. insuremytrip.com or

Travelguard.com are possible sites where field school participants may explore travel cancellation insurance quotes and policies. If you do purchase such insurance, make sure the policy covers the cost of both airfare and tuition. See this [Wall Street Journal article about travel insurance](#) that may help you with to help to decide whether to purchase such insurance

We do our best to follow schedule and activities as outlined in this syllabus. Yet local permitting agencies, political, environmental, personal or weather conditions may force changes. This syllabus, therefore, is only a general commitment. Students should allow flexibility and adaptability as research work is frequently subject to change.

You should be aware that conditions in the field are different than those you experience in your home, dorms or college town. Archaeological fieldwork in Ireland is carried out in all weather conditions – including rain. You are required to provide suitable waterproof and weatherproof clothing and footwear as well as wind protection. However, in bad weather you will also be provided with shelter. Archaeological investigation will include moderately strenuous physical work. Students must be in good physical condition and able to walk three miles a day comfortably.

If you have medical concerns, please discuss them with your doctor. All other concerns may be discussed with the project director – as appropriate.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The program will introduce students to a range of techniques used by modern archaeologists both in excavation and survey. Students will learn the typical progression of archaeological research through non-invasive survey, archaeological excavation and laboratory protocols (focusing on artefact curation and remedial conservation). Student research will be complimented by tours to a number of heritage sites, as well as a series of archaeological lectures/workshops:

- Understand different strands of archaeological enquiry and their application in an archaeological research context
 - Critically interrogate historical records and archaeological survey data, as part of an overall research design
 - Have an understanding of the skills required for the conduct of an archaeological excavation
 - Understand on-site laboratory protocols, and how these contribute to artefact research, conservation and interpretation
 - Have an understanding of the medieval history of both Ireland and Wexford
 - Have the skills to confidently and professionally excavate human remains and to identify and name the bones of the human skeleton (and distinguish it from animal bones)
 - Have an awareness of ethical protocols and considerations when handling human skeletal material
 - Understand skeletal analysis techniques and how to use these to determine sex, age-at-death, and living stature from complete/partial skeletons; as well as understanding the basics of palaeopathology and skeletal trauma identification
- Understand how heritage can be explained and presented in an engaging manner to visitors and the community alike

GRADING

Quiz (5%): A quiz will be held at the end of Week 2 to assess student understanding of archaeological techniques and their application in Irish archaeological research.

Field school Participation (50%): Students are required to participate in all field school activities, including research, archaeological survey, excavation and laboratory work. Assessment will be undertaken by the supervisory team and will be based on attendance, willingness to work and to try diverse tasks, attention to detail and accuracy, participation in teamwork and contribution to discussions.

Field Journal (30%): Students are expected to complete a field school journal and present it for evaluation during their final week on site. Project staff will instruct students on the expectations for workbook entries and will provide a mid-program assessment on journals, to allow students time to rectify any shortcomings.

Research Paper (15%): Students are expected to submit an individual research paper (1,500 words of text plus appropriate in-text citations, illustrations, and bibliography). The paper is due two weeks after the end of the field program though students may submit earlier if they so wish. This paper should be submitted via email as a MS WORD document to both Dr Linda Lynch (lindalynch1@eircom.net) and Dr Denis Shine (denis.shine@iafs.ie). For their research paper students will be assessed on their ability to organise and critically evaluate historical and field data, and the strength of their subsequent argument.

ACCOMMODATION

Students will stay with local families in the County of Wexford. Home Stay students live with local families, and experience true home life in provincial Ireland. Students will be brought to the site daily. Students should understand that some host families are in rural settings and may not be in the town of Ferns. Breakfast and dinner will be provided along with a packed lunch. Students are encouraged to avail of their free time at weekends and explore Ireland.

TRAVEL & MEETING POINT

We suggest you hold purchasing your airline ticket until six (6) weeks prior to departure date. Natural disasters, political changes, weather conditions and a range of other factors may require the cancellation of a field school. The IFR typically takes a close look at local conditions 6-7 weeks prior to program beginning and make Go/No Go decisions by then. Such time frame still allows the purchase deeply discounted airline tickets while protecting students from potential loss if airline ticket costs if we decide to cancel a program.

Students will be met at Edan's Cathedral, Ferns, Co. Wexford. Since students will arrive on different flights at different times of the day, we will meet all students on Sunday, June 14th, at the Cathedral at 4pm. Full details on reaching Ferns will be provided in the online orientation once you are enrolled in the course.

If you fail to make the meeting, please call/text or email Dr. Denis Shine. You will be sent relevant contact details once you are enrolled in the course.

VISA REQUIREMENTS

Citizens of the US and Canada do not require visas to enter Ireland. You will need your passport to be valid for at least 90 days and will enter on a tourist visa. Citizens of other countries are asked to check the embassy website page at their home country for specific visa requirements.

No vaccinations are required for entry to Ireland but anyone working in archaeology in Ireland needs to have an up-to-date tetanus shot.

CULTURE, LOCAL ENVIRONMENT & ETIQUETTE

The town/village of Ferns is 105km (about 65 miles) south of Dublin. Ferns is a quintessentially classic, small, friendly Irish village. Local agencies are aware of the students' presence in Ferns, and they and all townspeople are anxious to ensure that your stay is safe and enjoyable. Students are asked to respect local sensitivities and traditions and to understand that the presence of such a large expedition in Ferns does not entitle participants to any special treatment or privileges.

This project can involve the participation of volunteers from the local community (or elsewhere) alongside IFR students. Although everyone will speak English, all students should expect surprising cultural differences and exciting opportunities to learn not only about the past but about the lives of others as well. Students will be immersed in Irish culture through learning, language, food and music, and should be prepared for the rewards and challenges that life in a different culture will offer.

Please note: As the project is a public archaeology initiative, students must also be prepared to engage with the local community in a professional and respectful manner both in an official capacity on site and unofficially when off duty.

EXCAVATION/TOOL KIT

Students are required to bring a basic tool kit. This includes but is not limited to:

- A four inch pointed **archaeology trowel** (also known as a four inch pointing trowel): We recommend a Marshalltown type trowel (<https://marshalltown.com/4-stiff-london-style-pointing-trowel-wood-handle>).
- Work **gloves**: gardening glove suitable for work in wet weather (textile glove with a rubberised palm).
- Work shoes or boots: **closed toe-footwear, waterproof** that will be comfortable for both walking and kneeling: a hiking style shoe or boot would be suitable. Gumboots/wellingtons are also suitable for use on site however if you choose to wear these for digging, you may need pair of trail shoes or similar for field trips etc.
- **Waterproof outdoorwear**: a jacket (with a hood if possible) and pants – gore-tex is best (but expensive). You will need something sturdy that will stand up to wear and tear of everyday use in excavation. You can buy waterproof gear locally in Ireland (if you choose to do this, budget to spend about €50/\$70).
- **Warm layers** – wool, fleece, thermal layers – you should bring and wear lots of layers rather than one warm/heavy layer. Bring things that are suitable for outdoor work.
- **Sunscreen**: students should wear an SPF daily to protect against UV exposure and windburn.
- **Hat**: something to keep your head warm. A peaked hat can be useful for shade while digging.
- **Laptop/tablet**: a device on which you can prepare and submit your presentation and written assignments. A smart phone is not suitable for this.

FIELD PROGRAM

The field program, while focused on excavation and bioarchaeology, includes instruction in archaeological survey and post-excavation techniques. The program is primarily based in Ferns, although students will also be brought to several regional heritage sites. Site and project orientations will be conducted at the start of week one.

Week 1 - Orientation and Fieldtrips: Following project orientation and induction students will be introduced to the wider research area and period through a series of lectures and visits to regional heritage sites, such as Carrick, Bannow Bay and the Hook Lighthouse. These fieldtrips will help demonstrate the different physical, archaeological and cultural landscapes surrounding the site. The field trips are designed to help place Ferns within its broader historical and geographic context.

Weeks 2, 3 and 4

Excavation (located on site, under cover as appropriate): Students will be instructed in archaeological excavation and recording techniques – including excavation of archaeological features, documentation of finds, completion of site drawings and record taking of archaeological deposits. Excavations will be covered (as appropriate) to permit excavation in colder/wetter weather conditions. Potential areas of excavation include structural remains of the abbey, the monastic boundary, occasional burials (or disarticulated human bone: DHB) around the abbey, and other medieval features within the monastic complex. What each student excavates will depend entirely on the overall pace and research goals of the excavation at that time. There is no guarantee that human skeletal remains will be exposed during the excavation; while there is a high likelihood of remains being generated, this cannot be guaranteed.

Laboratory Protocols: A focus will be placed on the cataloguing and remedial conservation of both artefacts and ecofacts, according to standards set by the *National Museum of Ireland* (NMI). The NMI requires that all finds recovered in archaeological excavations are prepared, and conserved where necessary, according to strict protocols, in advance of submission to the museum. Students are expected to understand these processes and will get the opportunity to work with several different archaeological material types (pottery, glass, metal, bone etc).

Bioarchaeology: A focus will be placed on understanding Irish mortuary practice, specifically looking at the near continuous 1500 years of burial at St Aidan's Monastery itself. Where burials are exposed students will gain practical burial excavation experience; where burials are not exposed these skills will still be taught in a controlled staged environment. Students will also have the opportunity to analyse archaeological skeletal remains during laboratory sessions, which will cover: human and comparative osteology; determination of sex and age-at-death; living stature; identification of palaeopathological conditions, *etcetera*.

* The rotation of students through tasks including excavation, survey, bioarchaeology and post-excavation is dependent on weather conditions and student numbers; students may be split into smaller groups and rotated through different tasks simultaneously, while changes in the schedule are likely to be made to accommodate poor weather.

SCHEDULE

All IFR field school begins with safety orientation. This orientation includes proper behavior at the field area, proper clothing, local cultural sensitivities and sensibilities, potential fauna and flora hazards, review IFR harassment and discrimination policies and review of the student Code of Conduct.

In addition to working on site, students will be introduced to archaeological field methods, Irish archaeology, and bioarchaeology through a series of lectures/workshops (as outlined below). Students will also be given dedicated research during their time on site, to prepare their assignments and access local readings.

The normal working day is from 9:00am to 5.00pm with a morning tea break from 11:00-11:30am and lunch from 1:30-2:15pm. Students will have weekends free to explore the area and other parts of the country.

INDICATIVE SCHEDULE IN ADDITION TO SITE WORK*

Week	Day/Date	Time	Event
1	Sunday 14 th (June)	Afternoon	Students arrival and welcome meeting
	Monday 15 th	Morning	Lecture/Project Orientation
		Afternoon	Field trip 1: Tour of Ferns and Ferns Castle
	Tuesday 16 th	Morning	Lecture/Workshop: Archaeology of Medieval Ferns/Wexford
		Afternoon	Field trip 2: Tour of INHP and Carrick - A High Medieval Landscape
	Wednesday 17 th	Morning	Lecture/Workshop: Ferns Project and Heritage Outreach
		Afternoon	Field trip 3: The Hook Lighthouse, Bannow Bay, etc.
	Thursday 18 th	Morning	Lecture/Workshop: Bioarchaeology Workshop 1
		Afternoon	Lab Session: Assessing Skeletal Remains
Friday 19 th	Morning	Lecture/Workshop: Bioarchaeology Workshop 2	
	Afternoon	Lab Session: Assessing Skeletal Remains	
Saturday 20 th	All day	Free Day	
Sunday 21 st	All day	Free Day	
2	Monday 22 nd	All day	Introduction to excavation/staged burial excavation
	Tuesday 23 rd	All day	Introduction to excavation/staged burial excavation
	Wednesday 24 th	Morning	Excavation orientation
		Afternoon	On site (excavation [and post-excavation])
	Thursday 25 th	All day	On site (excavation [and post-excavation])
	Friday 26 th	Morning	Quiz and mid program journal assessment
		Afternoon	Independent research time (timing is weather dependent)
	Saturday 27 th	All day	Free Day
Sunday 28 th	All day	Free Day	
3	Monday 29 th	All day	On site (excavation, bioarchaeology and post-excavation)
	Tuesday 30 th	All day	On site (excavation, bioarchaeology and post-excavation)
	Wednesday 1 st (July)	All day	On site (excavation, bioarchaeology and post-excavation)
	Thursday 2 nd	All day	On site (excavation, bioarchaeology and post-excavation)
	Friday 3 rd	All day	On site (excavation, bioarchaeology and post-excavation)
			Independent research time (timing is weather dependent)
	Saturday 4 th	All day	Free Day
Sunday 5 th	All day	Free Day	

4	Monday 6 th	All day	On site (excavation, bioarchaeology and post-excavation)
	Tuesday 7 th	Morning	On site (excavation, bioarchaeology and post-excavation)
		Afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings to discuss student research • Turn in field journals
	Wednesday 8 th	All day	On site (excavation, bioarchaeology and post-excavation)
	Thursday 9 th	All day	On site (excavation, bioarchaeology and post-excavation)
		Evening	End of program cultural event
	Friday 10 th	All day	On site (excavation, bioarchaeology and post-excavation)
Evening		Prepare for Saturday departure	
Saturday 11 th		Depart	

**Please note: changes to this schedule will occur due to factors beyond our control such as weather, etc.*

MANDATORY READING

PDF files of all mandatory readings will be provided to enrolled students via a shared Dropbox folder.

- Corlett, C. 2012. Ferns, Co. Wexford. Heritage Guide No. 59. Archaeology Ireland: Dublin.
- Dowling, G. 2015. Geophysical Investigations at Ferns, Co. Wexford. Unpublished Technical Report for the Discovery Programme.
- Doyle, I. 2016. Telling the Dancer from the Dance: The Archaeology of Early Medieval Wexford. In I. Doyle and B. Browne (eds). *Medieval Wexford: Essays in Memory of Billy Colfer*. pp 35-61. Four Courts Press: Dublin.
- Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland. 2004. The Treatment of Human Remains. Technical Paper for Archaeologists. IAI: Dublin.
- Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland. 2006. IAI Code of Conduct for the Archaeological Treatment of Human Remains in the Context of an Archaeological Excavation. IAI: Dublin. Available online: http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content_files/file/et/98.pdf
- National Museum of Ireland: Policy on Human Remains. 2006. Available online: <http://www.museum.ie/NationalMuseumIreland/media/Corporate-Information/Policies%20and%20Guidelines/Policy-Human-Remains-Final.pdf>
- O'Keefe, T. 1997. Diarmait Mac Murchada and Romanesque Leinster: Four Twelfth-Century Churches in Context. *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 127, 52–79.
- O' Keefe, T. and C. Bates. 2016. The Abbey and Cathedral of Ferns, 1111-1253. In I. Doyle and B. Browne (eds). *Medieval Wexford: Essays in Memory of Billy Colfer*. pp 73-96. Four Courts Press: Dublin.
- Shine, D. and Mandal, S. 2017. Ferns Archaeological Site Handbook. Unpublished site handbook, which will be circulated to students after enrolment on the course. (Typically 50 pages in length).

RECOMMENDED READING/REFERENCE GUIDES

- Buikstra, J. E., & Ubelaker, D. H. 1994. *Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains*. Fayetteville, Arkansas: Arkansas Archaeological Survey.
- Byers, S. N. 2010. *Introduction to forensic anthropology*. Pearson Education, Boston.
- Colfer, B. 2002. *Arrogant Trespass : Anglo-Norman Wexford 1169-1400*. Duffry Press, Wexford, Chapters 1-4.
- Cox, M., & Mays, S. 2006. *Human osteology in archaeology and forensic science*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; New York.
- Duffy, S. 1997. *Ireland in the Middle Ages*. Gill and Macmillan, Dublin.
- Hillson, S. 1996. *Dental Anthropology*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Ortner, D. J. 2003. *Identification of pathological conditions in human skeletal remains (2nd ed)*. San Academic Press , Diego, CA.
- Roberts, C. A., & Manchester, K. 2007. *The archaeology of disease*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y
- White, T. D., & Folkens, P. A. 2005. *The human bone manual*. Elsevier Academic, Amsterdam; Boston.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- Barry, T. B. 1987. *The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland*. Routledge, London. Chapters 1-3.
- Bradley, J., Ó Drisceoil, C. and Potterton, P. (eds). 2016. *William Marshal and Ireland*. Four Courts Press, Dublin.
- Colfer, B. 2013. *Wexford Castles: Landscape, Context and Settlement*. Cork University Press, Cork.
- Doyle, I. and Browne, B (eds.) 2017. *Medieval Wexford: Essays in memory of Billy Colfer*. Four Courts Press, Dublin.
- Green, K. and Moore, T. 2010. *Archaeology, an Introduction*, 5th Ed. Routledge, Oxford. Chapter 3, Sections 3.3-3.5.
- Kavanagh, J. 2004. Ferns Upper, Ferns. Multi-period. in I. Bennett, Excavations 2004. Summary Accounts of Archaeological Excavations in Ireland, pp 466–7. Dublin: Wordwell.
- Sweetman, D. 2000. *The Medieval Castles of Ireland*. Boydell Press, Suffolk.
- Ryan, F. 2000. Archaeological Findings from Monitoring of Phase 1 of Ferns Sewerage Scheme, Co. Wexford, Unpublished Technical Report (98E0132) by Mary Henry Archaeological Services. Wexford.
- Ryan, F. 2012. Excavation of a Late Iron Age Ring-Ditch at Ferns Lower, Co. Wexford. In C. Corlett and M. Potterton (eds.) *Life and Death in Iron Age Ireland in the Light of Recent Archaeological Excavations*. pp 273-90. Dublin.
- Sheehan, C. 2006. Ferns Upper, Ferns. In I. Bennett, Excavations 2003. Summary Accounts of Archaeological Excavations in Ireland, 532. Wordwell: Bray.