

"The ABC of Earthwonders": The Life and Legacy of The Tim Robinson Archive



Tim Robinson travelling to Árainn, 1984
The Tim Robinson Archive, NUI Galway

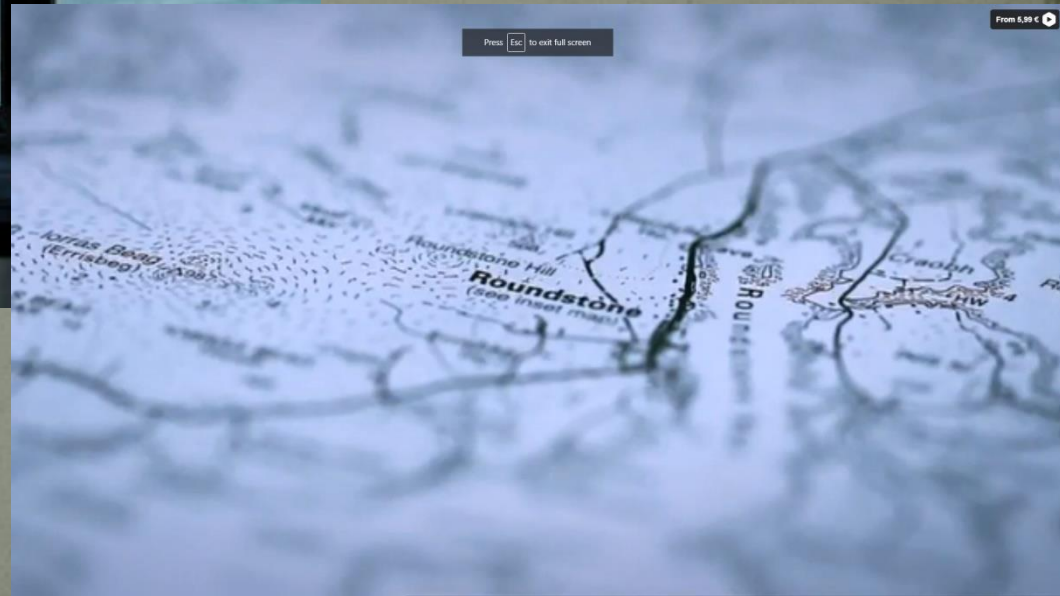
Dr Nessa Cronin, Centre for Irish Studies, NUI Galway, Ireland.
Burren Beo Tea Talks, 8 September 2021

Tim Robinson in conversation with Vincent Woods, Roundstone and NUI Galway (2014)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qozTus83d58> - to 3.36.



Tim Robinson – Connemara (2011, Harvest Films, Directed Pat Collins)



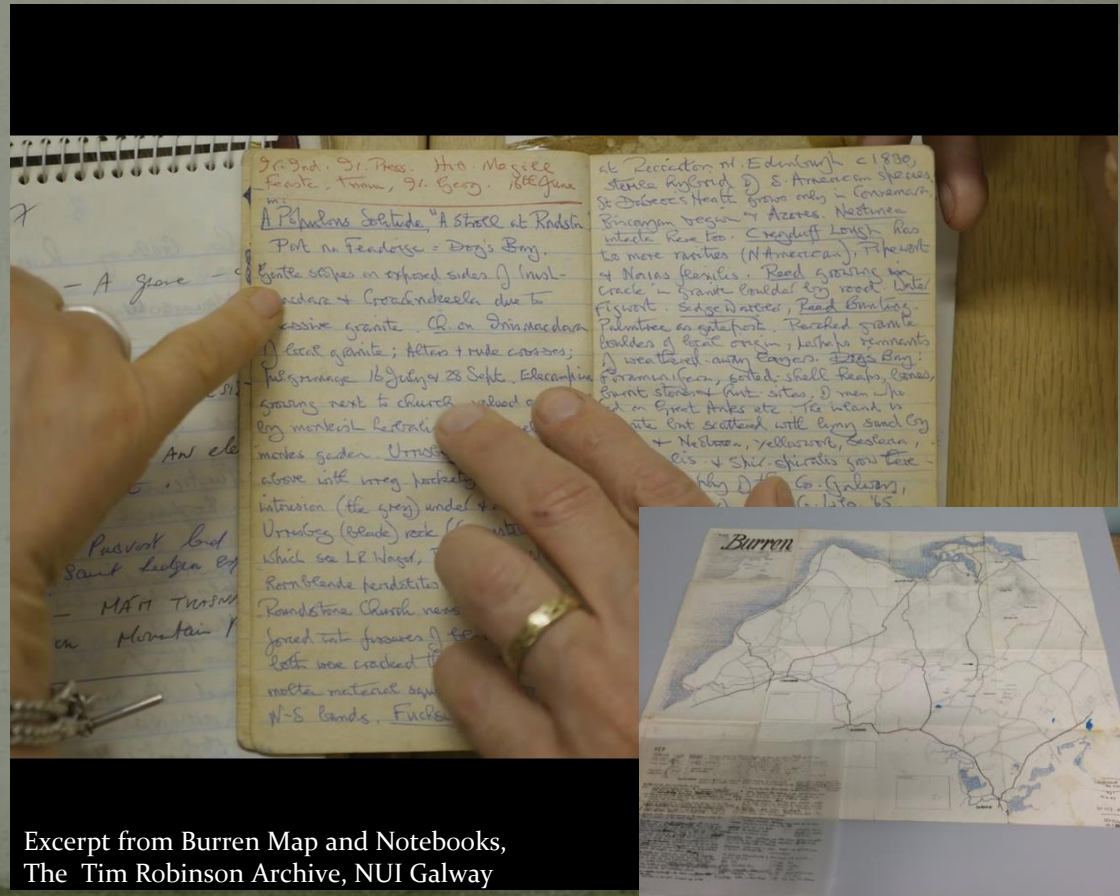
You can view the film in full here:
<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/timrobinsonconnemara>



IARSMA | *Fragments from an Archive*

‘my favoured mode of walking being not a single-minded goal-bound linear advance but a cross-questioning of an area, or even a deliberate seeking out of the *fóidín méaraí*, the ‘stray sod’, that is said to put anyone who treads on it wandering’.

- Tim Robinson, *Connemara*, ‘Walking the Skyline’, p. 364.



Excerpt from Burren Map and Notebooks, The Tim Robinson Archive, NUI Galway

Image reproduced with courtesy, The Tim Robinson Archive, James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway, Photographer Nicolas Fève and Proviz Design, 2016.

A black and white portrait of Tim Robinson, an older man with a beard and mustache, looking slightly to the left. A detailed map of a region, likely the Aran Islands, is overlaid on his face, with lines and text from the map appearing over his eyes and forehead. The background of the portrait is a soft, out-of-focus landscape.

Tim Robinson | Person

- Born in Yorkshire in 1935 - studied mathematics at Cambridge University. After a career as a visual artist in Istanbul, Vienna and London, he settled in the Aran Islands with his partner Máiréad in 1972 and began a detailed study of the landscape the West of Ireland through the lens of cartography and writing.

- The Folding Landscapes mapping project was Ireland's winning entry for the Ford European Conservation awards in 1987.

- Elected to Aosdána in 1996, and to the Royal Irish Academy in 2011.

- The Parnell Visiting Fellow at Magdalen College, Cambridge in 2011.

- Visiting Artist at the Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris in 2012.

- His paintings and constructions have been exhibited as part of joint and solo exhibitions at Camden Art Gallery, Serpentine Gallery, Irish Museum of Modern Art and the Hugh Lane Gallery

- He has won two Irish Book Awards for his writing on Ireland, and has undertaken a translation of Máirtín Ó Cadhain's *Cré na Cille* with Liam Mac An Iomaire which will be published with Yale University Press in 2015. Won the MLA Translation Prize 2018.

- His books include *Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage* and *Labyrinth*, the *Connemara* trilogy (*Connemara: A Little Gaelic Kingdom*, *Connemara: Listening to the Wind*, *Connemara: The Last Pool of Darkness*), and a suite of essays, *My Time in Space*.

- Documentary Film: *Tim Robinson: Connemara*, Directed by Pat Collins (Harvest Films, 2011)

- Essay Collection: *Unfolding Irish Landscapes: Tim Robinson, Culture and Environment*, edited by Christine Cusick and Derek Gladwin (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2015)

- *Connemara and Elsewhere*: Photography inspired by Robinson's Connemara – Nicolas Feve, French photographer living in Dublin.

The Tim Robinson Archive, NUI Galway

- ‘Most of these writings relate to the ABC of earth wonders - Aran, the Burren, Connemara - that I have been spelling out in the maps; some go farther into holes and corners, others fly off into wider spaces’

- Tim Robinson, ‘Preface’, *Setting foot on the shores of Connemara & other writings*, 1996



- ‘I try to ensure that copies of as many as possible of these lists [of placenames] from Connemara and Aran and the Burren come into my hands, and are added to my archive, which will eventually go to NUI Galway. Now, it may be that some minor historical puzzles can be resolved through consulting such lists, or a scholar may use them to buttress a thesis about land-use or emigration or plant distribution. That is, the placenames become grist to the academic mill. Artists and writers may pick and choose among them for their own creative purposes.’

- Tim Robinson, ‘The Seanchaí and the Database’, *Irish Pages*, 2003



Tim Robinson | Archive

The Tim Robinson Archive, NUI Galway (2014-present)

In 2006, the Robinson Archive was officially donated to NUI Galway as part of a generous gift to the people from the region from Tim and Máiréad Robinson. The process of depositing and cataloguing the archive commenced in July 2013 with a team of librarians and scholars, with the majority of the items being deposited in Autumn 2014.

Series of events in September 2014 to mark the preview of the Robinson Collection at NUI Galway:

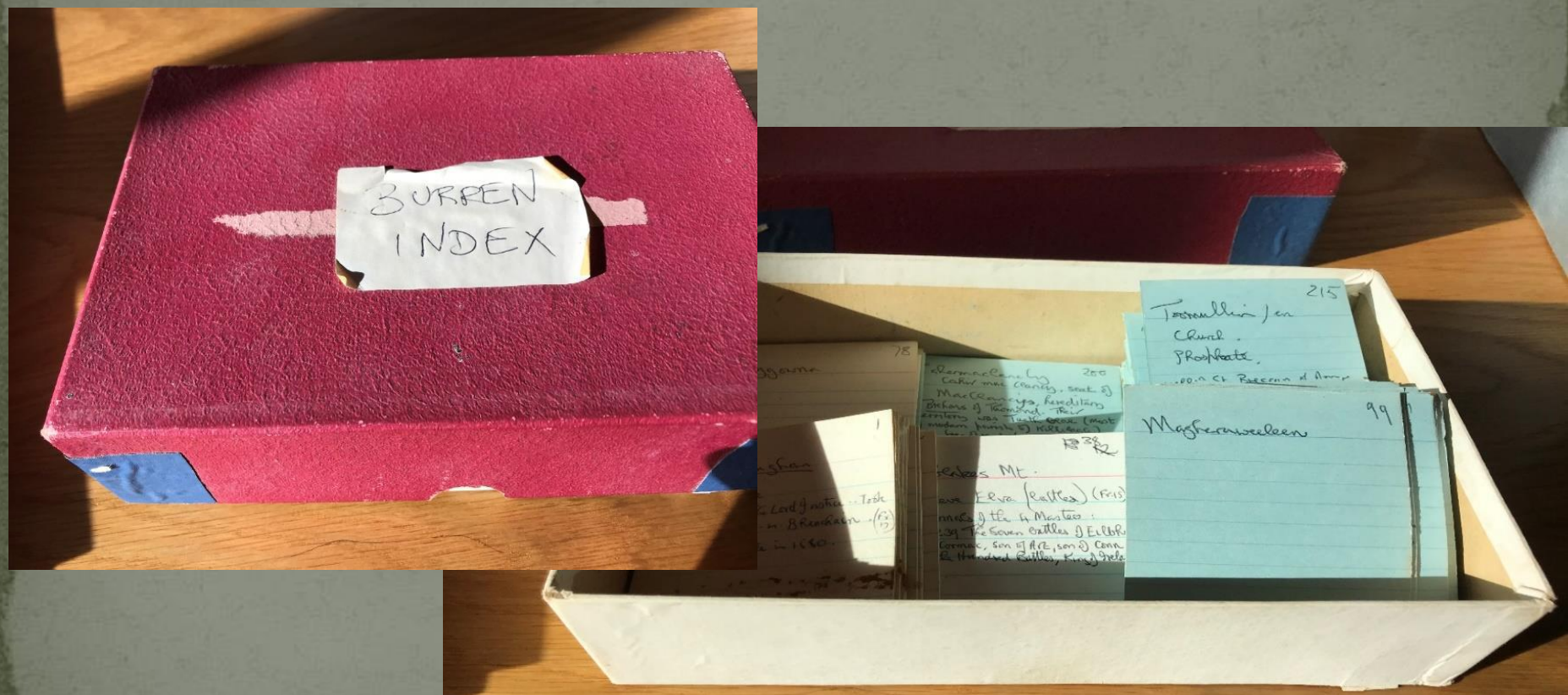
- Exhibition, Book Launch, Conference, Public Interview, RTE Radio 2 Part Documentary, meeting of Royal Irish Academy, and Moore Institute Visiting Fellowship Scheme.

Archive Contents: (Maps, Manuscripts, Placename Index Cards)

- 489 pages of maps
- 9,650 pages of correspondence dating from 1960-2010
- 24,365 pages of manuscripts, and first editions of his maps and books
- 300 Irish and English language reference books
- material relating to his life and work in Vienna, Istanbul, London and Cambridge
- 11,700 items of placename index cards contained in 13 drawers
- field notebooks, index cards, rubbings
- drawings, photographs and other fieldwork related material and observations relating to work in the Burren, Connemara and the Aran Islands since 1972

“one of the world's most precious and delicate terrains”

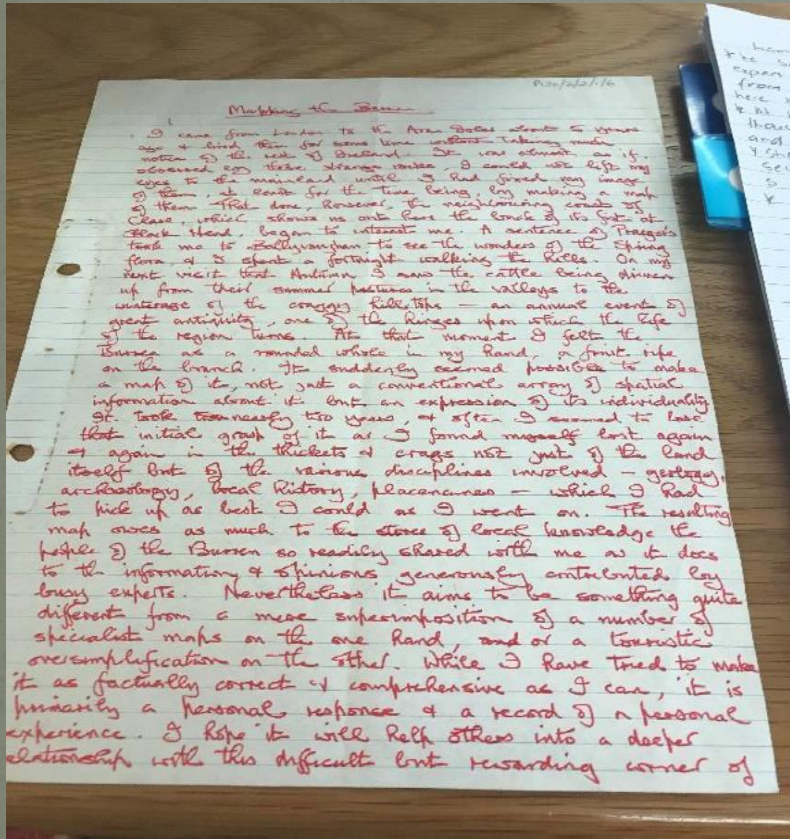
The Burren Material, Tim Robinson Archive, NUI Galway



Credit: Ciaran Gallagher
(3BA Student 2020 Final Year Irish Studies' BA Project)

'Mapping the Burren'

Tim Robinson. Árainn 8/11/77.



"A sentence of Praeger's took me to Ballyvaughan to see the wonders of the spring flora, of which I spent a fortnight walking the hills. On my next visit that Autumn I saw the cattle being driven up from their summer pastures in the valleys to the winterage of the craggy hills - an annual event great antiquity, one of the hinges upon which the life of the region turns. At that moment I felt the Burren as a rounded whole in my hand, a fruit ripe on the branch. It suddenly seemed possible to make a map of it, not just a conventional array of spatial information about it but an expression of its individuality at that initial grasp of it as I found myself lost again - again in the thickets of crags, not just of the land itself but of the various disciplines involved - geology, archaeology, local history, placenames - which I had to pick up as best I could as I went on. The resulting map owes as much to the store of local knowledge the people of the Burren so readily shared with me as it does to the information & opinions generously contributed by busy experts. Nevertheless it aims to be something quite different from a mere superposition of a number of specialist maps on the one hand, and of a touristic oversimplification on the other. While I have tried to make it as factually correct & comprehensive as I can, it is primarily a personal response & a record of a personal experience. I hope it will help others into a deeper relationship with this difficult but rewarding corner of

At that moment I felt the Burren as a rounded whole in my hand, a fruit ripe on the branch. It suddenly seemed possible to make a map of it, not just a conventional array of spatial information about it but an expression of its individuality."

Kilcorney Cill Coirne

Baile Uí Micil

Barr Gleanna slaid (one name)
(i.e. Barr)

C. Chomnaill (trad. that Boris
fought battle against James ~~the~~ chief
Conall Rex)

Aentaide beaga little fairs

Glean slaid (slaughter, carnage)
(Caislean Gleanlead)

Lios na n-drom

Maicne Maoilín (Moylenis)

Poll an adair (cauldron) [Poulaine]

" na brón (queen)

Poll na sgeai (bounded on N by
Barr S. & on E by
(around Uiscobanua, Kilcorney Glebe)

← south is site of castle: Killcolman
(Shaue)

Teamhull Cille Coirne

C. na marile (Pollgom Td)

C an ard dorais (Glenleade Td)

Lis na ndrom (the lios is in W. of the
Td. near road to Noughaval Ch.)

T. na n-angal (no stations)

Lios Colman tráie (maire)

(Tobar Dúine Baitlé cures several diseases
esp. blindness)

Uamann a Sturragadain (the Sturragadan)
(in Eantobeg N., east of cliff E of Loch E.)

Uamann Poilla muilinn (cave)
(Eantobeg N., E. of above)

Caves (of horses) lead to Tír na Róige

Garr-cluain

Kilfenora

Cill Caíraic (Shan Tompaí)
said to be 5th Cent.

Cill Chaimín

Caisleán a maga

Hollywell Ho. (Lomyn, Thomas)

Bullán Fachtna (in Kelf.)

C. Éamoinn (inscriptions
each enclosed &
Name 1687)

Lios Ceit (Keith's)

Drummin (Drinion fort)

Cnoc ard na ngábal (forks)

Cnoc carraic (muged)

[Kilfenora: The Green. Fairs]
4th June & 29 Sept.

Ballykeel Old House, ruins in
orchard SE of B. House, W. of
rd from Kilmoren to Kelf.

Tobardane (the Deals well)

Lios cnoc a caitín, centre of
Kelf. Td.

Cill Fionnabhrach (Fionnabhair)

Baile Bán

" Uí Braoin (Breeds)

Uí Caíail

" clainne Caíail

Uí Gúndáin

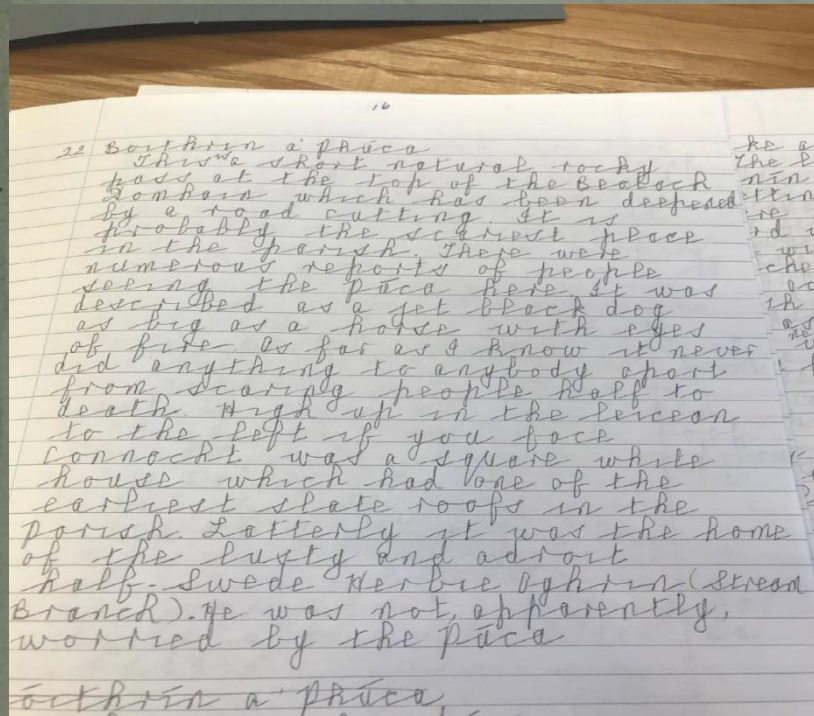
Uí Thomlaíog

" Caol

Cinn maraga
na caíraic

Page from hardbound notebook entitled 'Burren Map: notes for Edition 1' by Tim Robinson, with placenames list for Kilcorney and Kilfenora, [1976-1977]. Tim Robinson Archive, NUI Galway.

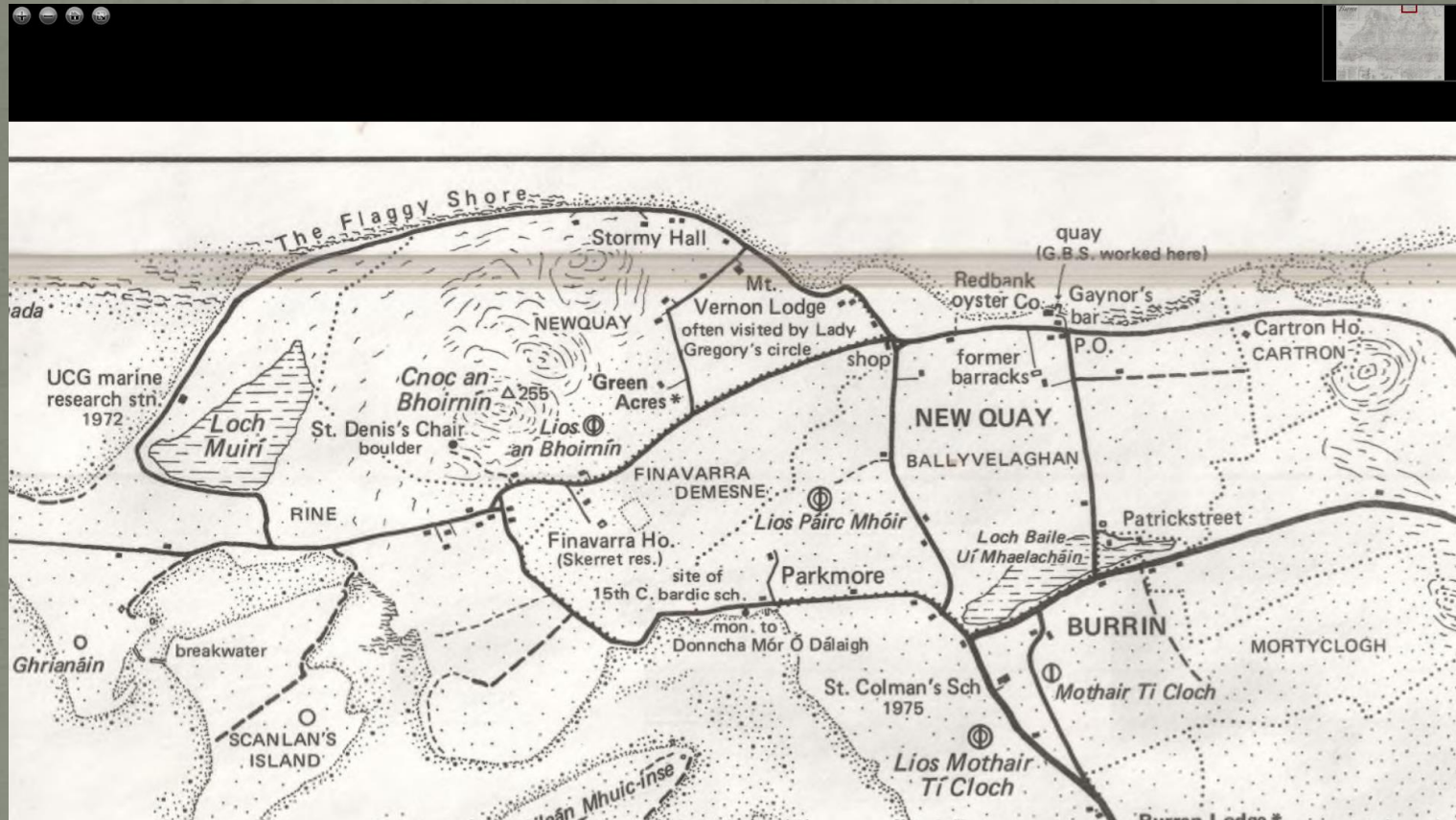
Sample from Liam MacGloinn's 'Burrenology' letter to Tim Robinson (300 page MS, n.d.)



“The Bell Harbour people are the most
piseogach superstitious people in
Ireland but that’s another matter.”
MS p. 31.

MS p. 24 - “I have been turning
the names that I do not understand
the meaning of over in my mind
trying to remember how the old
people said them or any jokes that
they made about the names. I am
almost sure that seise means a
hazel forest around Seise Mór and
there was even more when I was
young before reclamation grants.
However, ask the scholars.
Somebody must have written down
seise in the last thousand years.”

The Burren Map (1977, 1999)



- Burren Map digitised:
<https://digital.library.nuigalway.ie/islandora/object/nuigalway%03A10955>

The Art of Mapping

‘...I am free to concentrate on that mysterious and neglected fourth dimension of cartography which extends deep into the self of the cartographer.’

– Tim Robinson, ‘Islands and Images’, p. 19.



‘I approached mapping as an art-form particularly suited to ordering large amounts of fact into an expressive whole. So I came to the practice of cartography largely ignorant of its specific techniques, theories and received ideas, or to say deeply suspicious of its technological and organizational structures that distance the drawer of the map even farther from the place to be drawn, alienating the hand from the foot.

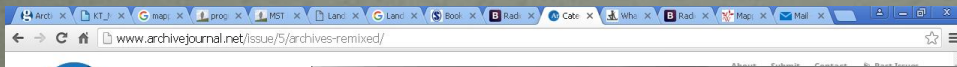
For me, making a map was to be a one-to-one encounter between a person and a terrain, a commitment unlimitable in terms of time and effort, an existential project of knowing a place. The map itself could hardly then be more than an interim report on the progress of its own making.’

– Tim Robinson, ‘Interim Reports from Folding Landscapes’, pp. 75-76.

The Art of Writing

‘How can writing, writing about a place, hope to recuperate its centuries of lost speech? A writing may aspire to be rich enough in reverberatory internal connections to house the sound of the past as well as echoes of immediate experience, but it is also intensely interested in its own structure, which it must preserve from the overwhelming multiplicity of reality.’

– Tim Robinson, ‘Preface’, *Connemara: Last Pool of Darkness*, p. 3.



Archive Journal
Issue 5 - Fall 2015

Archives Remixed Critical F
OF THE DIS
Radical

Radical Archives
Edited by Lisa Darms and Kate Eichhorn

Introduction by Lisa Darms

As an archivist working with the archives of experimental Collection (which documents the feminist, punk youth mo the theme of "Radical Archives," I always wonder: What d extreme political or social change. In the United States, it to any extreme break with tradition or the mainstream. A s willing to take extreme or even violent action to effect soc

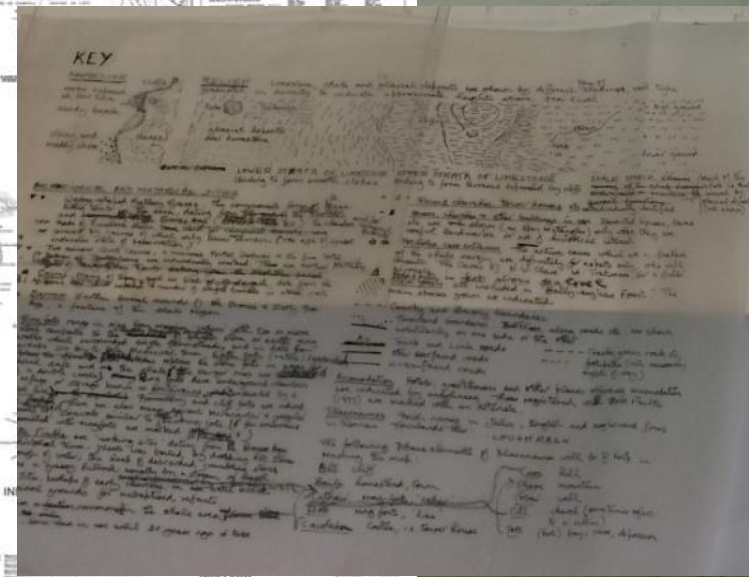
What, then, are the radical archives under discussion here activities of the archives' creators, and the actions docum collected? Or can radical refer to extreme or activist pract description, preservation, and access?

One can just as easily ask (as we did in our CFP for this issu it first seems. "The Archive" is a subject that theorists hav has tended toward the abstract, seldom engaging with actu archivists. As co-editors of this issue, Kate and I felt that a

OILEÁIN ÁRANN

ARANN

KEY



The Living Archive

Iarsma: Fragments from an Archive, is the Artists in the Archive project conceptualised by Nessa Cronin in 2015 where a group of artists were commissioned to jointly work in collaboration on the theme of landscape in relation to the Tim Robinson Archive at NUI Galway.

Choreographer Ríonach Ní Néill, composer and musician Tim Collins, and visual artist Deirdre O'Mahony worked with Nessa over a six month period to form the *Performing Landscapes Collective*.

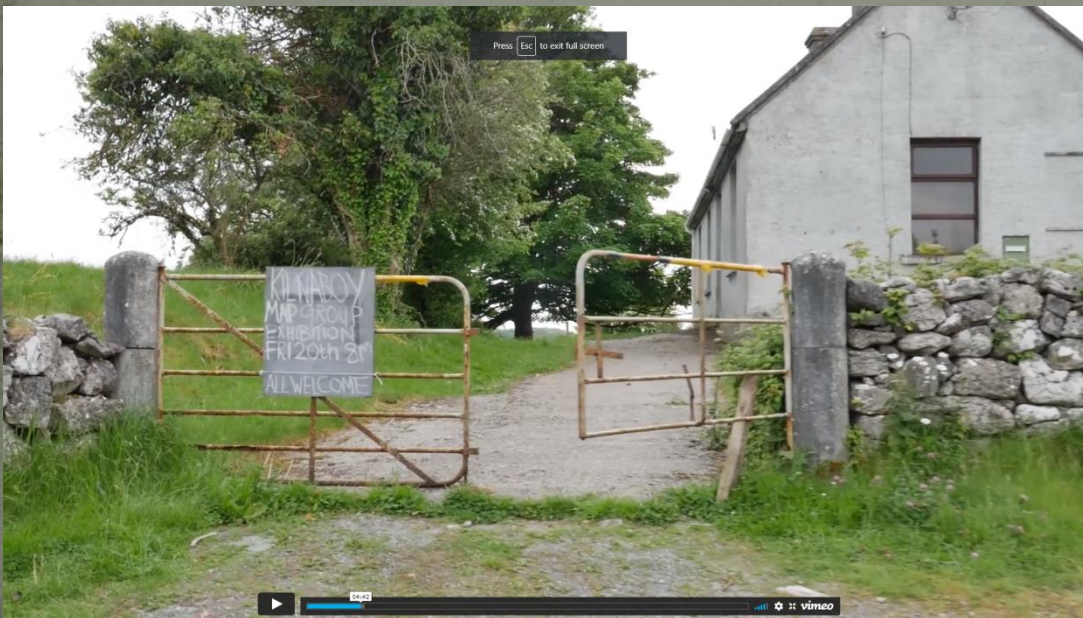
The film was directed and produced by **Deirdre O'Mahony** on location in the Robinson Archive, the Burren and Connemara.

The score was composed and arranged by **Tim Collins**, including the newly commissioned pieces, 'Anthem: Ómós Tim Robinson', 'The View from Above', 'Sir Donat's Road', 'Sheas sí an Fód', and 'Labyrinth'.

Ríonach Ní Néill's recorded and live movement segments, 'Bird in the Archive', 'Léarscáil an Cheathrú Rua', and 'my foot is my pen' utilise contemporary dance environmental research and embodied mapping practices.



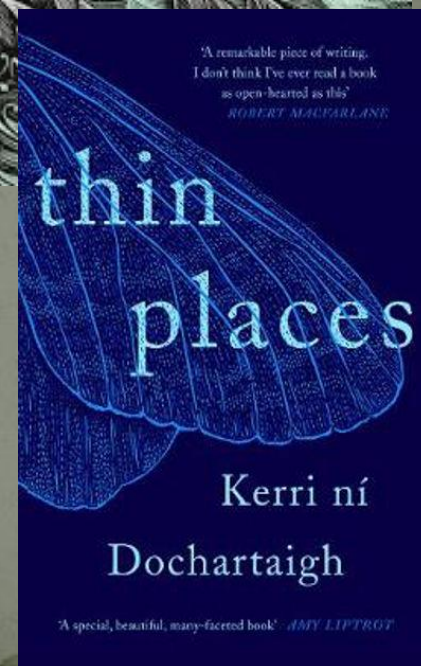
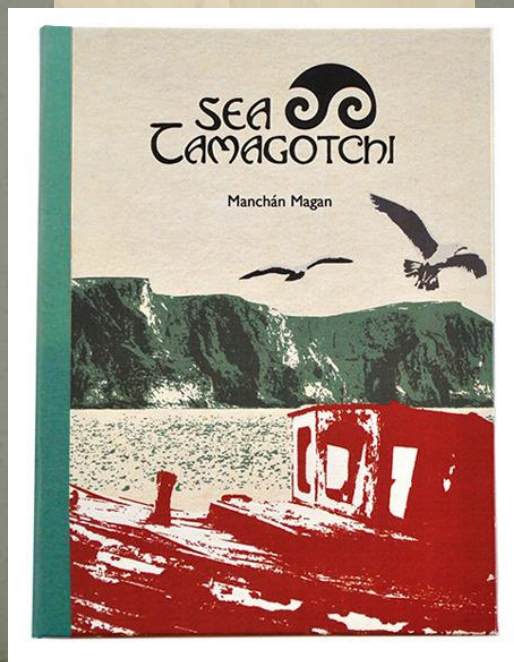
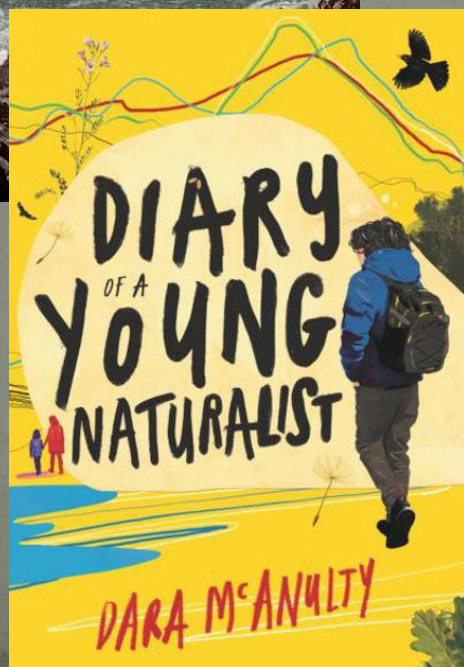
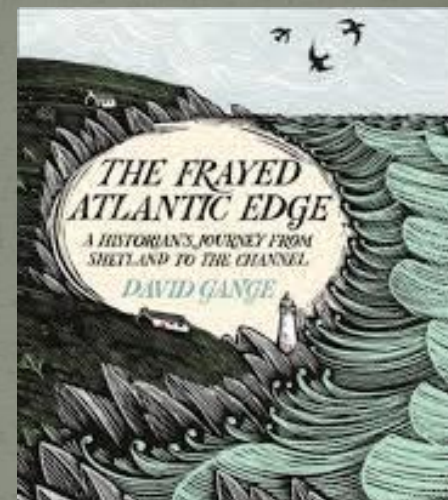
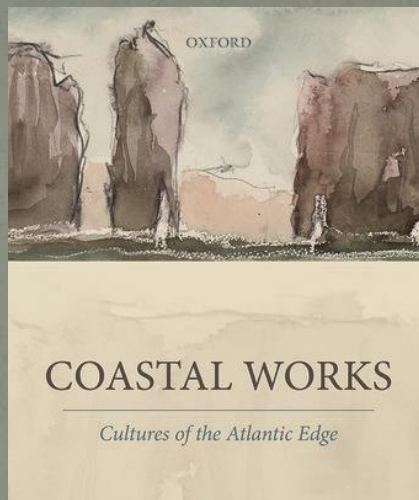
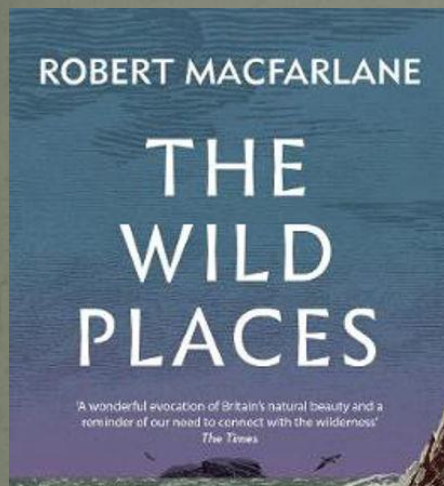
Robinson's personal placenames index-card cabinet.
Film still, *Iarsma: Fragments from an Archive*, ©2016.



X-PO Mapping Group, Kilnaboy, Co. Clare
Film still, *Iarsma: Fragments from an Archive*, ©2016.

<https://vimeo.com/177667932/775452859b>

The Living Archive – Literary Legacies



Visual Art Legacies: The Littoral Flâneuses, Ruby Wallis and Michaele Cutaya



Q&A with the artists on Culture Night, September 2021. Engage Art Studies Gallery.

<https://engageartstudios.com/>

See also the Tim Robinson Art Collection at IMMA

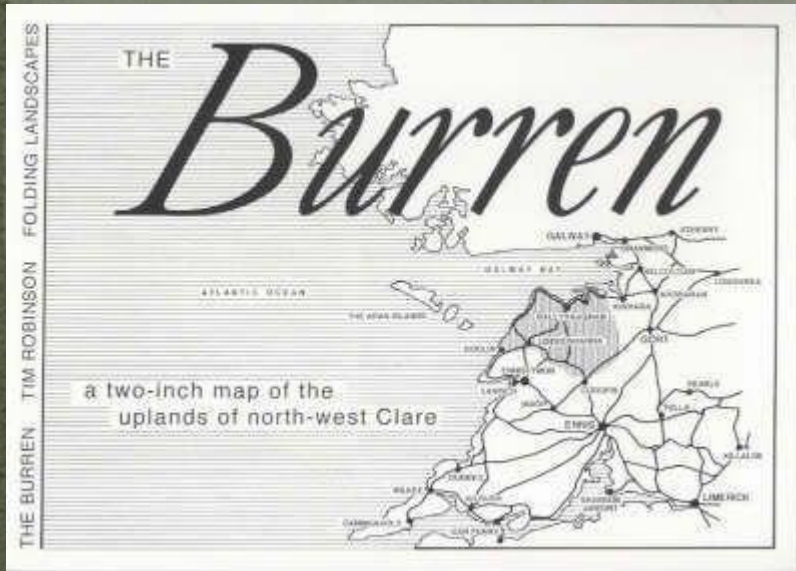
<https://imma.ie/artists/tim-robinson/>

Reconsidering landscape legacies ...

Introduction to the 1999 edition of the Burren Map.

“These mentions of some of the Burren's characteristics are enough to show that this is one of the world's most precious and delicate terrains. So, how are we looking after it?”

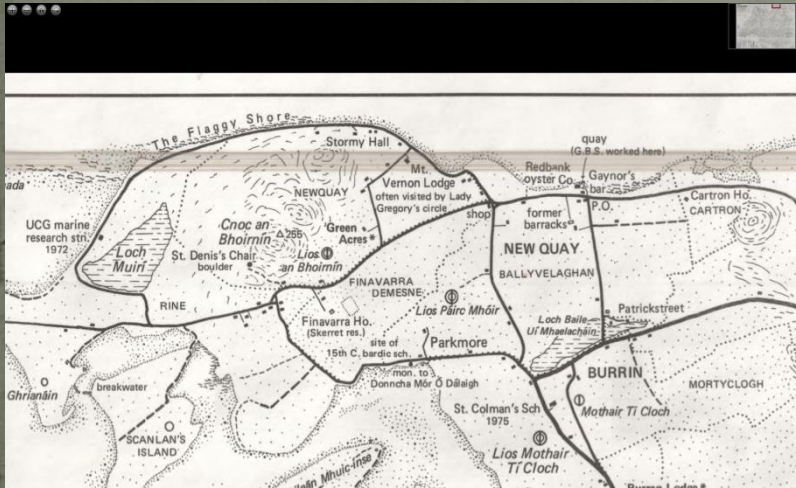
Until lately the pace of change was so gentle that traces of all previous stages showed through and added to the texture of the landscape. The cave, the glacial boulder, the ancient tomb, the fairy fort and the abandoned cottage stood around the farm like familiar spirits, and wildflowers bloomed between them.”



https://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/oclare/folklore/glas_gaibhne_of_burren.htm

Community legacies...

and hopeful futures...



“In updating my map I have had to delete a holy well, a children's burial ground, a boulder that was a saint's chair, and several other precious details lost to agri-vandalism. However, the institution of the Rural Environment Protection Scheme, and the spread of the Burren National Park, foretell, I hope, the end of the Age of the Bulldozer.



To create an economy worthy of its setting in the Burren will call for the inventive powers of the nation and the local community. My contribution is this map of our holdings and responsibilities.”

- Tim Robinson 10/6/99