



ULSTER  
ARCHÆOLOGICAL  
SOCIETY

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# Survey Report

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Reference: **Survey Report No. 78**

Author: **Harry Welsh**

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Location:

**Survey of Ringneill Quay  
Ringneill  
County Down**

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In association with:

 **National Trust**



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Cover illustration: View of Ringneill Quay, looking north-east

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## 1. Summary

### 1.1 Location

A site survey was undertaken at Ringneill Quay, County Down, on Saturday 29 June 2019. Ringneill Quay is located in Ringneill townland, Parish of Tullynakill and Barony of Castlereagh Lower at Irish Grid reference J 5230 6538. Ringneill townland has previously been noted for activity during the prehistoric period, but the area has a much richer story of human life, continuing to the present day. This is discussed further below. The survey was the sixth in a series of planned surveys undertaken by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society during 2019.

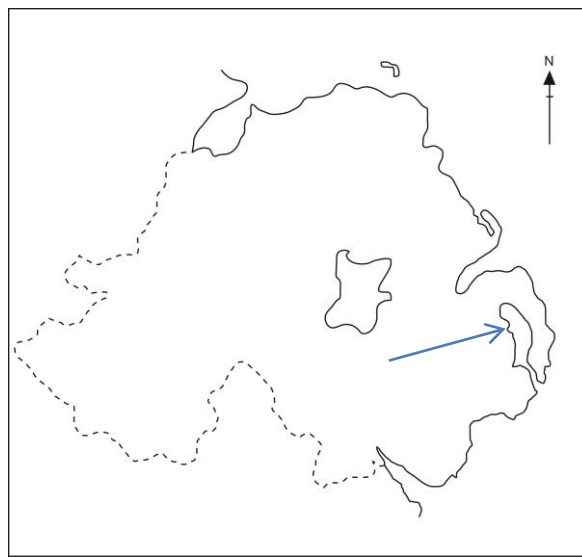


Figure 01: Location map

### 1.2 Aims

In order to enhance the archaeological record of this site, the aims of this survey were to produce accurate plan drawings of the monument and carry out a photographic survey. This information was compiled into a report and copies submitted to the National Trust and to the archives of the Ulster Archaeological Society.



Figure 02: Survey Group members in action at Ringneill Quay

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background

The survey of Ringneill Quay, known locally as *Dorn Quay*, or *Dornan's Quay*, was carried out by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society, in response to a decision taken by the committee of the society to extend an opportunity to members to participate in practical surveys of archaeological monuments that have not previously been recorded. This followed a bequest to the society from the late Dr Ann Hamlin, from which the items of survey equipment were purchased. During discussions with Malachy Conway, Archaeologist of the National Trust in Northern Ireland, it was noted that many archaeological sites on National Trust property had not been subject to a detailed archaeological survey. It was therefore agreed that members of the society would commence a programme to survey these sites and Ringneill Quay was subsequently chosen to be the seventy-eighth of these.

It had been hoped to survey the remains of the wrecked schooner *Fanny Crossfield* on the same day. The wreckage lies immediately to the west of the quay, but the proposed survey had to be abandoned, due to the presence of a lightning storm in the area. However, the Survey Group returned to the site on 27 July 2019, when the wreck was also investigated. This will be the subject of a separate report in due course.

### 2.2 Previous archaeological surveys

Ringneill Quay is recorded in the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) as MRD 168:114 and is classified as a stone quay. It is ascribed to the Post-Medieval period in the SMR and is described thus:

A rectangular quay, known locally as the 'Dorn Quay', is situated on the eastern shore of Ringneill Townland, just to the north of the causeway leading to Reagh Island. It is shown on the OS map of 1858, as 'Ringneill Quay', but not on the 1834 edition. It projects roughly east-west across an upper foreshore of shingle and small stones and beyond it to an area of more sparsely-scattered, larger stones, with a few boulders, on mud. An expanse of soft mud extends out to LWM. A tidal inlet, named 'Straiddorn' is shown flowing north/south towards the quay on the IG map, ending about 200m to the north of it at low water. The quay is well maintained, measuring 30.33m in length and 16m in width at the landward, western end and tapering to 12.9m at the seaward end. It is 1.1m high near the western end and 2.5m high at the eastern end. The core construction is probably earth and gravel fill, but the upper surface is now grass covered. The edge is formed by concrete slabs which cap an outer facing of stone and mortar. The upper part of the stone facing, which comprises local greywacke with some Scrabo sandstone, shows signs of repair where fresh mortar has been added. There is a general tendency for stones, particularly in the lower part of the quay, to be vertically set, though not exclusively so, and this trend seems less obvious on the northern side than on the south. Four substantial wooden mooring posts stand on the quay side, two on the north and two on the south. One measures 69cm high and 24cm in diameter, and the others are of similar dimensions. All are tapered at the top and two, at least, are set in concrete. They are still used for mooring vessels. Seaweed all along the northern side and traces on the south suggest that the quay is partially covered, at high water, at least during spring tides. The main band of weed extends 2.65m in from the northern edge, with further fronds lying up to 5.0m from the edge. Large stones have been cleared from the shore on the southern side, where a small fishing boat is moored, and some clearance is also evident on the north. The area round the quay is dry at low water (HED, SM7 File).

The quay and the wreck of the *Fanny Crossfield* were also noted during the compilation of the Strangford Lough survey (McErlane et al 2002, 382-383).

### 2.3 Cartographic Evidence

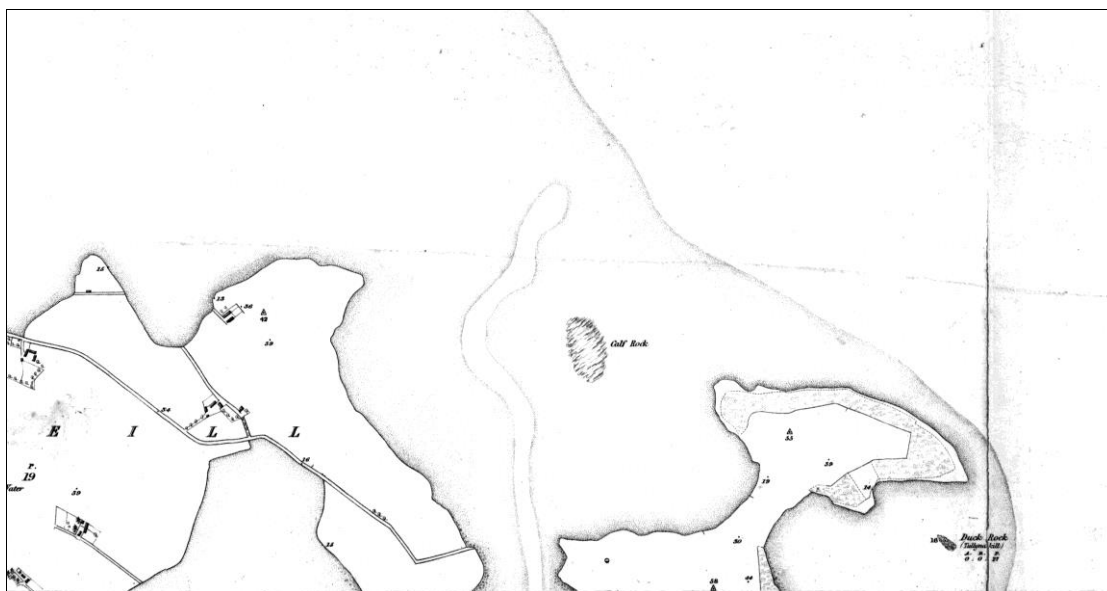


Figure 03: OS County Series, Down, Sheet 11 (part of), First Edition 1834

Ringneill Quay was not recorded on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1834 (Figure 03) and what is today the main road to Mahee Island stops at the shore, close to where Ringneill Quay now stands. A stone slipway is recorded on the SMR (MRD 168:104) a short distance to the south-west of where the 1834 road terminates (Irish

Grid reference J 5229 6535) and this was probably the means whereby people could access Reagh Island by boat, before the quay was built. Another stone slipway (MRD 168:038) has been recorded a short distance away (Irish Grid reference J 5250 6550) on Reagh Island and this was probably contemporary with the slipway at Ringneill.

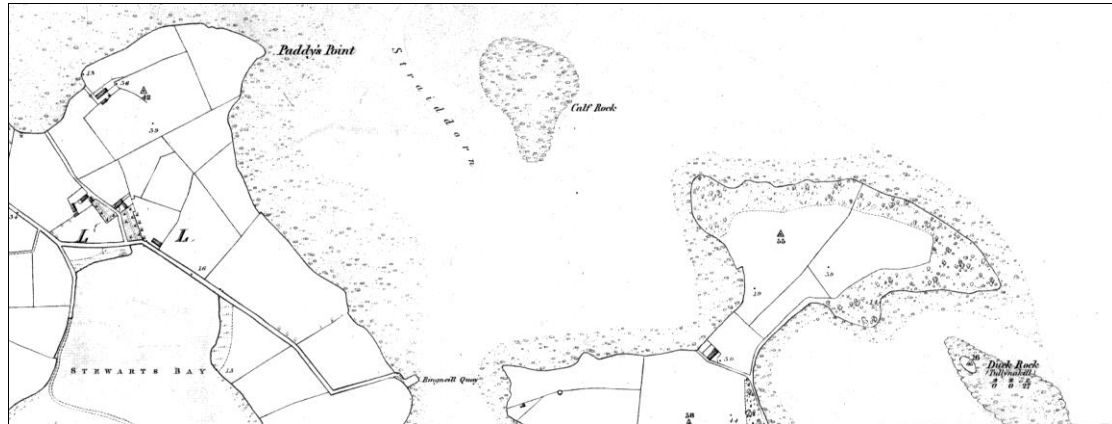


Figure 04: OS County Series, Down, Sheet 11 (part of), Second Edition 1859

Ringneill Quay is recorded on the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1859 (Figure 04), so the pier must have been constructed between 1834 and 1859. A navigable channel is recorded on the First Edition map, annotated *Straiddorn* on subsequent maps and was clearly the route to be taken by vessels approaching Ringneill Quay. By 1904 (Figure 05), a causeway had been constructed to connect the mainland with Reagh Island and this is shown to have blocked this channel at Ringneill Quay. By stopping the flow of water at this point, the presence of the causeway led to the silting up of the surrounding area and impaired the use of the quay as a loading or unloading facility for shipping in Strangford Lough.

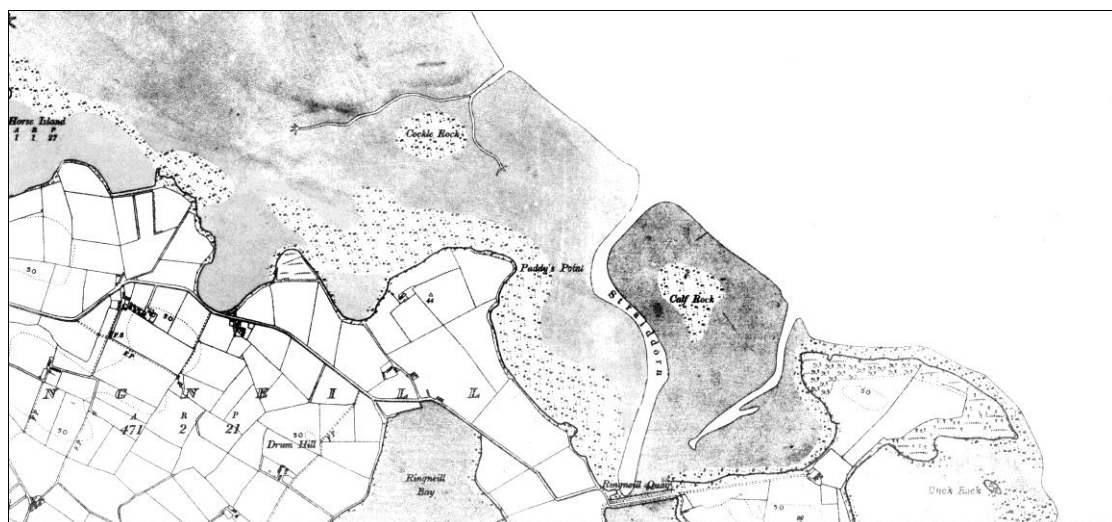


Figure 05: OS County Series, Down, Sheet 11 (part of), Third Edition 1904



## 2.4 Archiving

Copies of this report have been deposited with the National Trust and the Ulster Archaeological Society. All site records have been archived by the National Trust at Rowallane, Saintfield, County Down.

## 2.5 Credits and Acknowledgements

The survey was led by Harry Welsh and included David Craig, June Welsh, Ian Gillespie, Lee Gordon, Liz McShane, Colin Boyd, Hilary Boyd, Anne MacDermott, Janna McDonald, Moira O'Rourke, Randal Scott, Chris Stevenson, Leo van Es, George Johnston, Kate Crane, Ian Forsythe, Helen Yohanis and Paula Sandford. The Ulster Archaeological Society is particularly grateful to Malachy Conway, Archaeologist of the National Trust, who worked closely with the survey team in choosing the site and facilitating access.

## 3. 2019 UAS Survey

### 3.1 Methodology

It was decided that the survey would take the form of the production of plan drawings and elevations, accompanied by a photographic survey. This report was compiled using the information obtained from these sources, in addition to background documentary material.

### 3.2 Production of plan drawings

Plan drawings and elevations were completed, using data obtained from the field survey. Measurements were obtained by using the society's *Leica Sprinter 100* electronic measuring device. Sketch plans at 1:100 scale were completed on site by recording these measurements on drafting film secured to a plane table and backing up the data on a field notebook for subsequent reference. Field plans were later transferred to a computer-based format for printing.

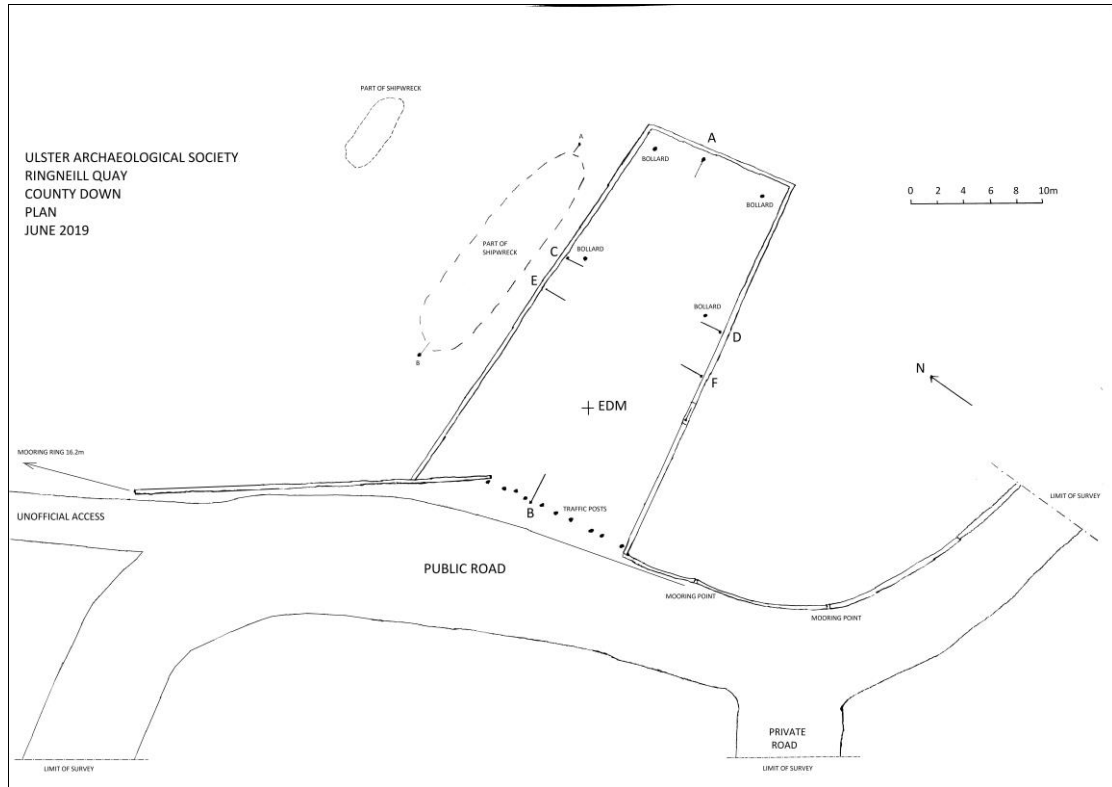


Figure 06: Plan of Ringneill Quay

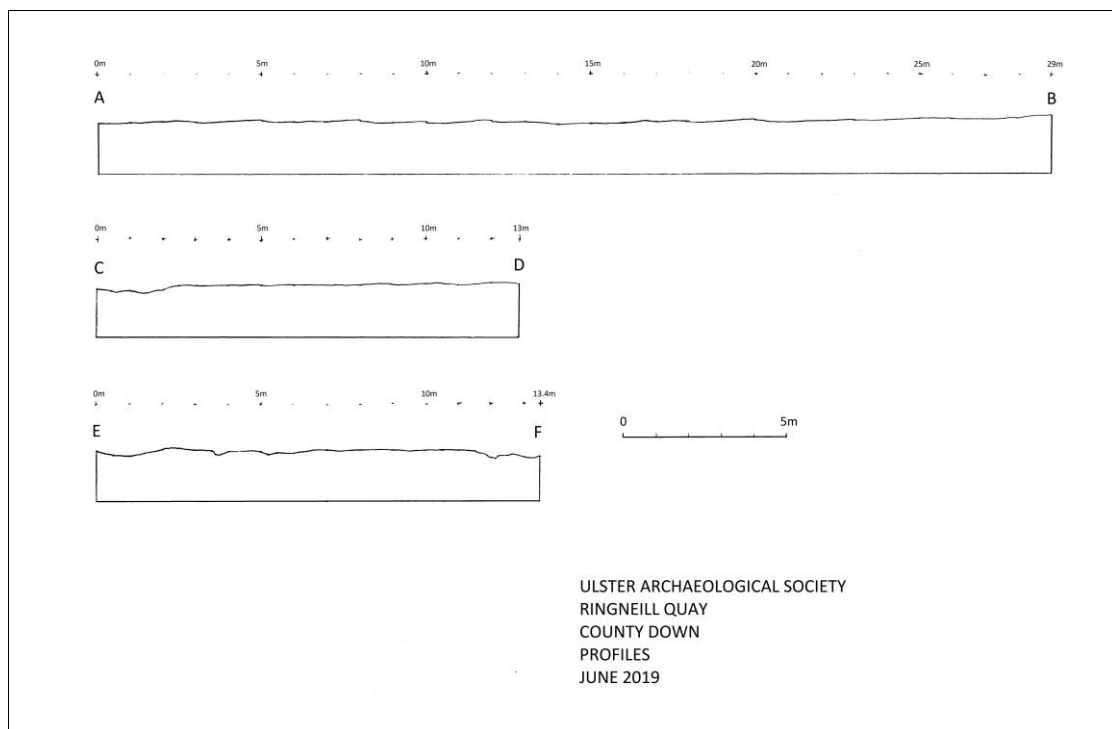


Figure 07: Profiles of Ringneill Quay

### 3.3 Photographic archive

A photographic record of the site was taken by using a *Ricoh G600W* 8 megapixel digital camera and others. A photographic record sheet was employed, corresponding to photographs taken during the site survey on 29 June 2019. The archive has been compiled in jpeg format and saved to compact disc.



Figure 08: View of south-western sea wall, looking west



Figure 09: View of quay and north-western sea wall, looking south



Figure 10: View of north-facing wall of quay, looking west

Figure 10 shows the construction materials and methods of the quay. The seaward end of the quay is formed of rectangular boulders, with some effort made to bond these together horizontally for added strength. This is more obvious at the upper level, where sandstone blocks have been carefully laid for this purpose. However, towards the landward end of the quay, boulders have predominantly been laid vertically, leading to reduced horizontal strength and increased liability to subsidence and collapse.



Figure 11: Quay composition materials, including iron nail

Figure 11 demonstrates the materials used to infill the quay, behind the stone external walls. Where it is exposed, this material is predominantly small cobbles, pebbles, sand and earth. It is not clear if there were internal walls to provide support for the external stone walls. Perhaps geophysical survey, such as ground-penetrating radar might provide confirmation of these.



Figure 12: Northern mooring point location (with modern post)

Figure 12 provides a view of the position of one of four mooring points provided on the quay for securing ship's lines. These are currently provided with wooden posts, approximately 10cm in diameter and are clearly modern. A photograph taken of the quay in *c.*1938 (McErlane et al. 2002, 383) shows a ship tied up to the quay, but no bollards are visible. It is likely that the mooring points on the quay, at least in 1938, consisted of steel rings, similar to that investigated on the foreshore during the 2019 UAS survey (Figure 17). These have been removed at some point in the past, presumably after the quay fell out of use.



Figure 13: Modern damage to coping on north wall of quay



Figure 14: Portion of partial collapse of quay



Figure 15: Partial collapse of southern wall of quay, indicated by change of levels in coping. Yellow flags indicate areas of collapse at surface level



Figure 16: View of north-facing (seaward end) of the quay wall, showing construction materials and techniques

In addition to the four mooring points provided on the quay itself, three other mooring points were observed during the 2019 survey. These included a mooring ring, set in concrete on the shore, some 50m to the north-west of the quay (Figure 17). Two mooring points were observed within the structure of the south-western sea wall and

demonstrate rounding by the rubbing of mooring lines (Figures 18 and 19). These mooring points currently serve as drainage channels from the causeway road surface.



Figure 17: Mooring ring to the north-west of the quay





Figure 18: Mooring point re-used as drainage channel



Figure 19: Mooring point re-used as drainage channel

#### 4. Discussion

Ringneill townland is located on the western shore of Strangford Lough and many historic sites of maritime importance have been identified there (Figure 20). Several prehistoric sites have also been identified in the townland and archaeological excavations took place in 1955 at a Mesolithic site 300m to the south-west of the quay, where charcoal, bones and flints were recovered (Stephens et al. 1960, 47-48).

Monument details	SMR Number	Irish Grid Reference
Mesolithic occupation site	DOW 011:017	J 5225 6535
Standing Stone	DOW 011:019	J 5043 6569
Barrow	DOW 011:020	J 5037 6538
Mesolithic occupation site	DOW 011:026	J 5155 6551
Mesolithic occupation site	DOW 011:027	J 5068 6615
Stone fish trap	MRD 168:037*	J 5180 6615
Bulldozed channel	MRD 168:039	J 5170 6550
Cleared slipway	MRD 168:043	J 5152 6527
Field boundary extension	MRD 168:045	J 5132 6597
Oyster midden	MRD 168:098	J 5220 6530
Oyster midden	MRD 168:099	J 5191 6588
Hulk: Schooner <i>Fanny Crossfield</i>	MRD 168:101	J 5229 6540
Cleared slipway	MRD 168:102	J 5190 6471
Shore laneway	MRD 168:103	J 5213 6510
Stone slipway	MRD 168:104	J 5229 6535
Stone quay	MRD 168:114	J 5230 6538
Kelp cultivation area	MRD 168:117	J 5222 6572
* Scheduled monument		

Figure 20: List of monuments at Ringneill recorded in SMR

Ringneill Quay is trapezium-shaped in plan, broadest at 16m where it connects to the shore and 12.9m at the seaward side. It is 30.33m in length and is aligned east/west. It currently stands 1.1m in height at the shore side and 2.5m in height at the seaward side, but is probably much deeper, hidden by silt and mud that has accumulated in the area following the construction of the causeway to nearby Reagh Island.

Areas of partial collapse, visible at ground level on the quay, indicate that the quay was constructed of stone boulders with a rubble and earth infill. There is little evidence of mortar bonding the boulders together and it is presumed this has been gradually washed away. The greywacke boulders are rounded and of various dimensions, suggesting a local origin and little effort has been made to lay these in horizontal layers or bond them together for strength, suggesting the quay was constructed by unskilled workers (Figure 16). Similar methods of construction are visible at the Horse Ferry Slip and the Watch House Quay at Strangford village (McErlane et al. 2002, 241-242). These have also been dated to between 1834 and 1858 and are probably contemporary with Ringneill Quay, perhaps even constructed by the same engineers.

Some effort to strengthen the external walls of the quay was made with the use of sandstone blocks, predominantly at upper levels of the northern end of the quay, indicating that some skilled work had taken place here, possibly to repair an earlier collapse. Around the top of the quay, a concrete coping, approximately 1m in width, has been added. This and the obvious repairs to the boulder walls are the only evidence of comparatively recent efforts to maintain the structure.

## **5. Recommendations for further work**

It is clear from the limited survey carried out by the UAS that Ringneill Quay is in a poor state of repair and partial collapse. It will be for the National Trust to decide if the structure should attract the substantial expenditure required to stabilise it and prevent further deterioration.

In any event, it is recommended that regular inspections be made by competent engineers to ensure that the structure remains safe for public access, as it is currently one of the attractions visited by many people in the area.

It is further recommended that further archaeological investigation be carried out at the quay and surrounding area, in order to achieve the fullest possible archaeological record before any further collapse takes place.

During the survey, abundant debris from recent oyster farming was observed around the quay and adjacent shoreline. Local informants commented that commercial fishermen were using the quay to moor their boats for unloading and had damaged the quay as a result. Further, they had constructed an access track to the east of the quay and vehicle tracks were observed leading from this into the mud flats, presumably in connection with fishing activities. The National Trust may wish to investigate these claims.

## **6. Bibliography**

McErlane, T, McConkey, R. and Forsythe, W. 2002. Strangford Lough, an archaeological survey of the marine cultural landscape. Belfast: Blackstaff.

Morrison, M.E.S. 1960-1961. 'The Palynology of Ringneill Quay, a New Mesolithic Site in Co. Down, Northern Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, Vol. 61, 171-182.

Stephens, N., Collins, A.E.P., Jope, M. and Proudfoot, V.B. 1960-1961. 'The Quaternary Deposite at Ringneill Quay and Ardmillan, Co. Down', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, Vol. 61, 41-77.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

Site: Ringneill Quay, County Down

Date: June 2019

Make and model of camera...Ricoh G600W & others

<b>Frame no</b>	<b>Viewed From</b>	<b>Details</b>
DSCN8569	North	Survey Group members in action at Ringneill Quay
DSCN8573	East	View of eastern sea wall
DSCN8626	West	View of quay and western sea wall, looking east
RIMG0055	North	West-facing wall of quay
RIMG0054	North-west	North-facing wall of quay
RIMG0036	Above	Exposed portion of quay construction materials
RIMG0039	North	View of north-western bollard location
RIMG0029	East	Damaged coping at north wall of quay
RIMG0001	North	Mooring ring located to west of quay
RIMG0035	Above	Portion of collapsed quay surface
RIMG0017	North	View of mooring point/drainage channel
RIMG0018	North	View of mooring point/drainage channel
RIMG0050	South-west	Western wall of quay, showing partial collapse of wall
RIMG0009	West	View of quay and western sea wall