

Doctor of Philosophy

# The Forgotten Mothers in the Cillín:

spectral traces in the landscape and memory,  
woven in sound

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**THE GLASGOW  
SCHOOL OF ART**

# Documentation portfolio

Final Submitted Work  
Requiescat

## *Requiescat* – Audio Sound Work

Traveling Exhibition

Audio Link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/jbcxlc7uvb4z7tr/Requiescat%20-%20the%20Forgotten%20Mothers.wav?dl=0>



*Requiescat* – Priest's traveling sacrament case. (Photo credit Anias Kroeger)



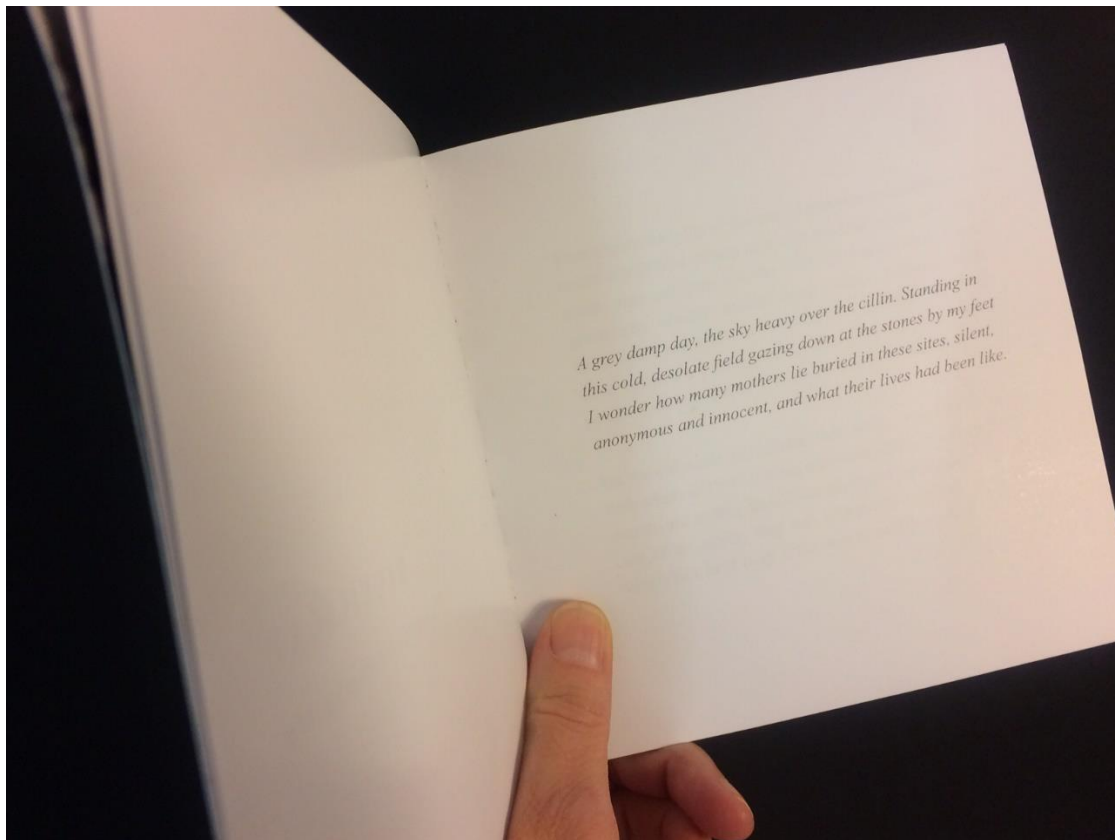
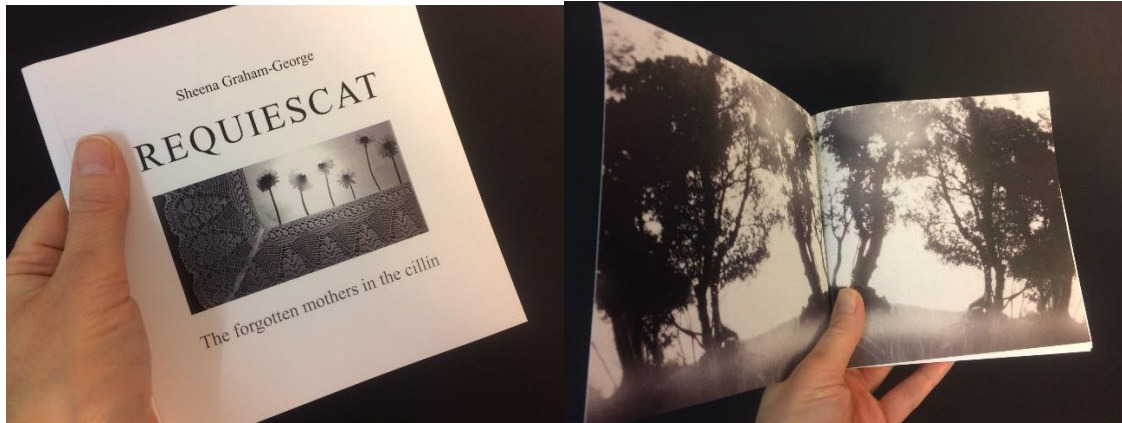
Requiescat – Priest's traveling sacrament case. (Photo credit Anias Kroeger)

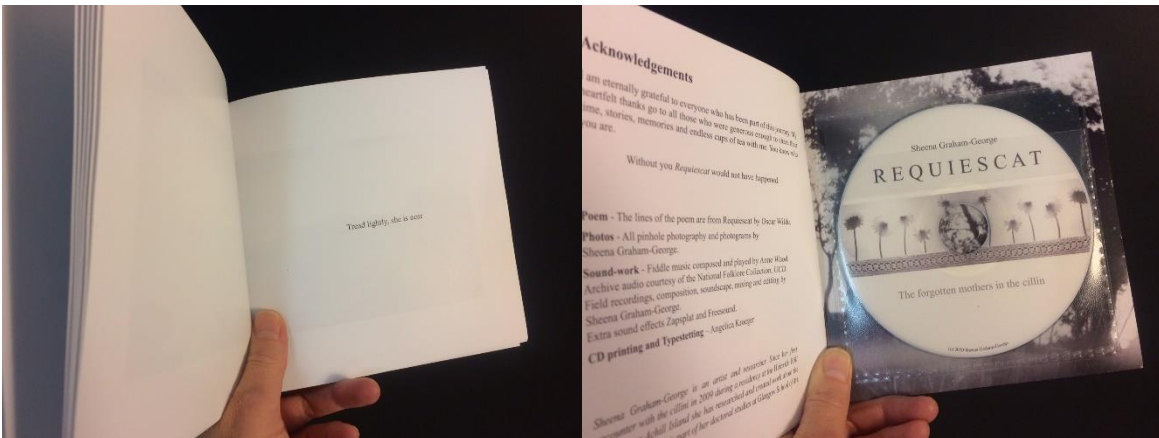
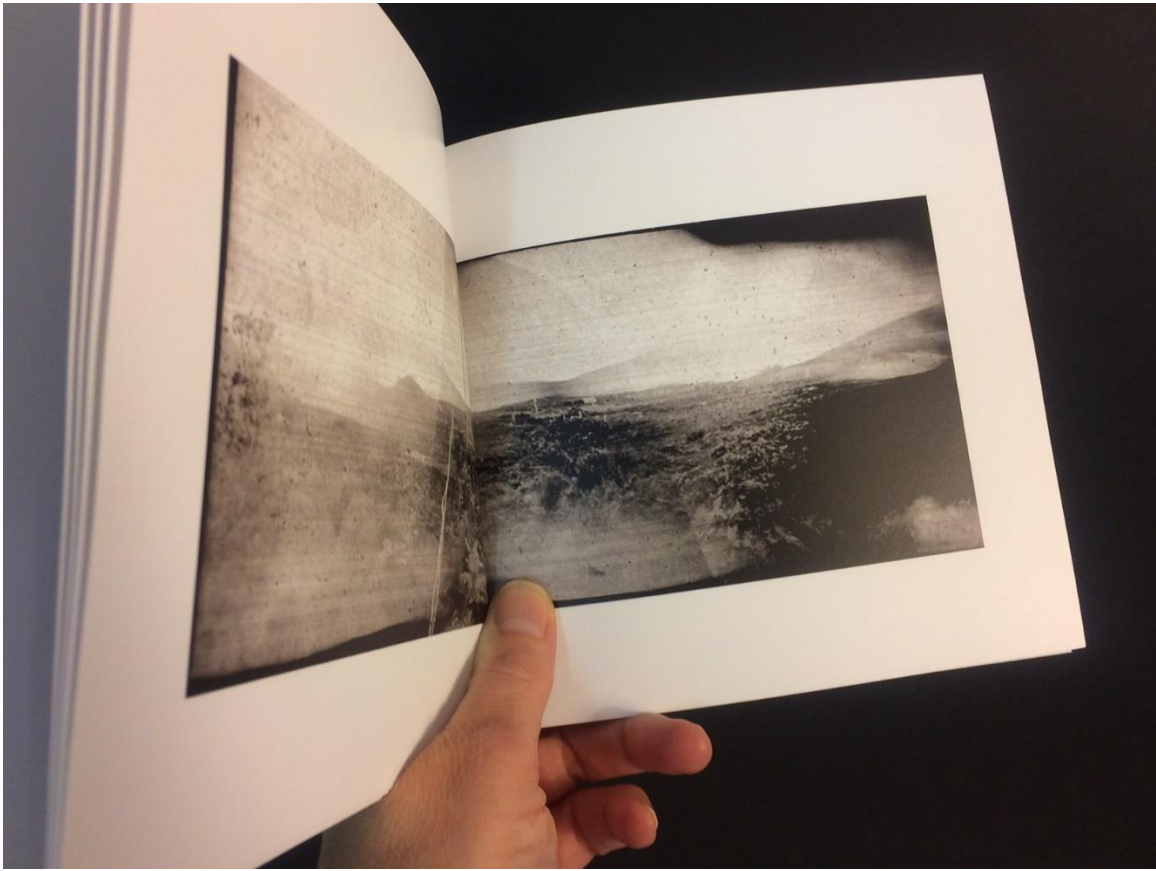


Requiescat – Detail of artist's books

## Booklet and Audio CD

Donated to libraries throughout County Kerry.





(For full booklet – see PDF Print version.)



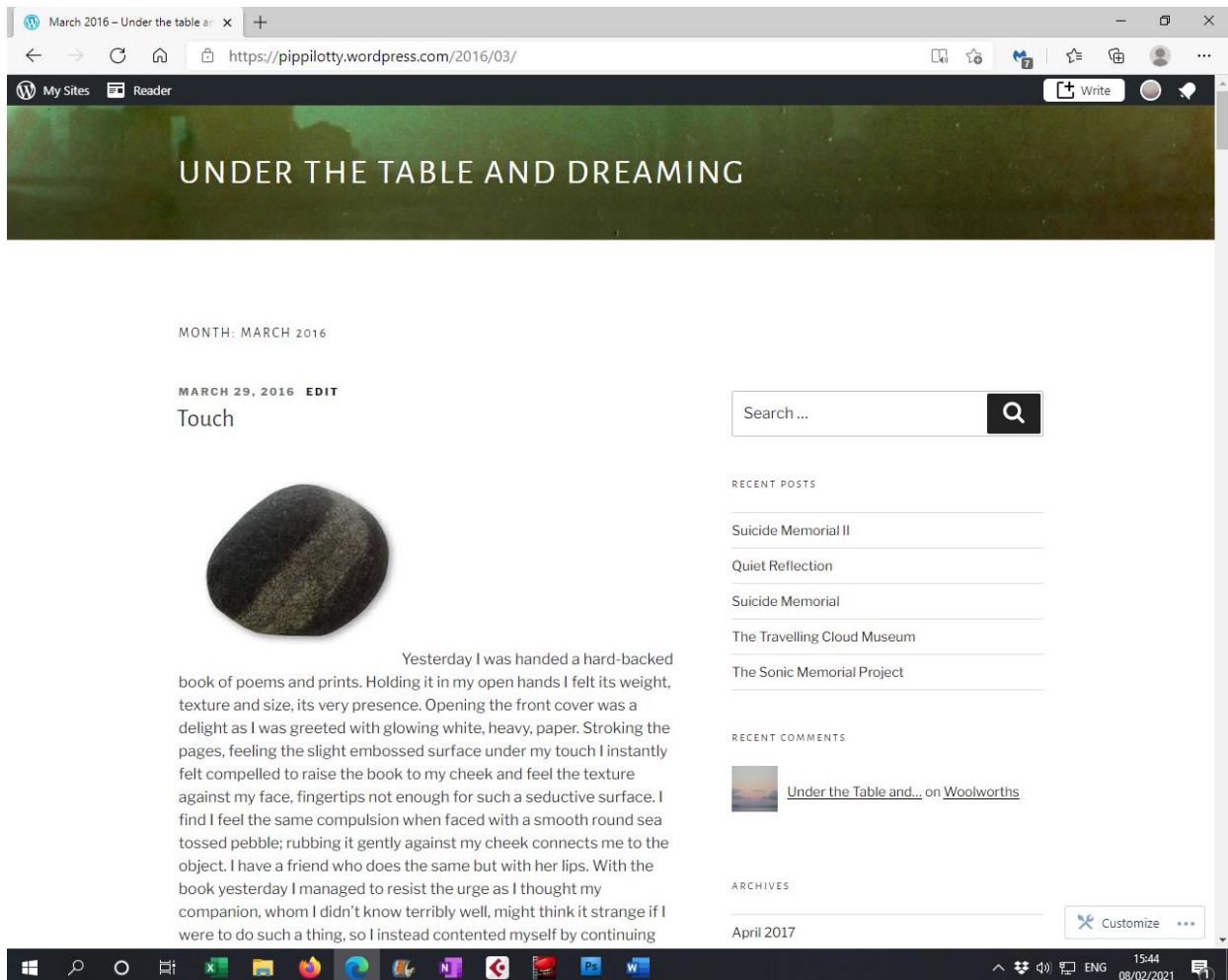
# Sketchbook Experiments: Methods of Enquiry

## Introduction

The works contained in this portfolio document and illustrate my experimentation through creative practice during my period of research. The works are arranged in chronological order starting with my earliest explorations to give a clear understanding of my thought processes as I explored memory, deep-mapping and the steps I took as I worked towards a resolution of my research through practice eventually resulting in *Requiescat*.

As part of my creative practice, I kept a blog from 2016-2017 which reflected on my journey towards ultimately using sound as my primary medium.

Link: [Under the table and dreaming \(wordpress.com\)](https://pippilotty.wordpress.com/2016/03/)



Cover page of personal research blog

2015

### Dunquin Harbour – Site-specific

The harbour at Dunquin was the link between the Blasket Island and mainland Ireland. It was here that currachs would land carrying the coffin of an islander to be taken for burial in family plots nearby. Across from here can be seen the Great Blasket and the village where the cillín lies nestled and where babies and some adults were buried.

I was interested in exploring the collective memory inscribed within the landscape. I experimented using a series of candle-lights to evoke the cultural memory found within Irish folk-belief that a departed soul was seen as a light and an un-baptised soul, a flickering faint light.

The experiment was pertinent to one very small aspect of social history associated with just the Blasket Islands, even though it was aligned with a traditional folk-belief I felt the reach of the work was too narrow and limiting in its scope and concept and not one to be pursued.



Steep steps leading down to the pier and slipway at Dunquin – Great Blasket in the background



Light experiment Dunquin 1



Light experiment Dunquin 2



Light experiment Dunquin 3



Light experiment Dunquin 4

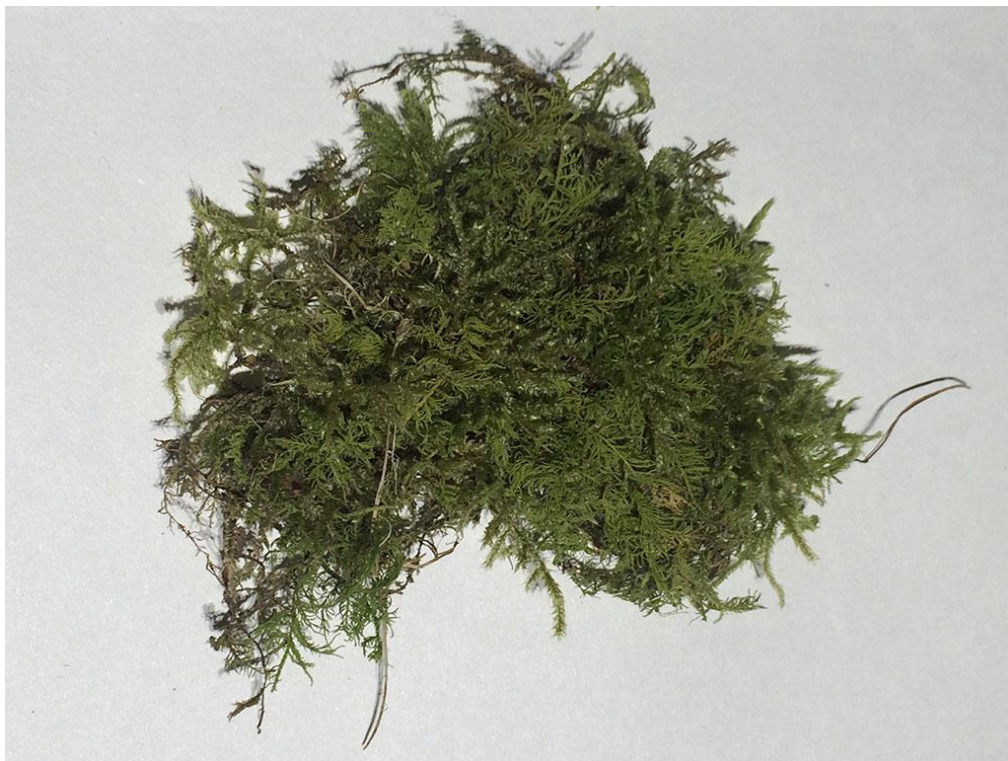
2016

## Ceramics - Touchstones

I experimented with ceramics to explore the sense of touch, how to hold another person's hand in empathy and solidarity – but at a distance. They were made with different clays, glazes and techniques.

As part of my deep-mapping of the sites I collected elements from the landscape – moss, lichen, sheep's wool, leaf skeleton's, soil, quartz - to incorporate into the stones – and give a sense of an embodied landscape.

I enjoyed the physicality of the medium and incorporating aspects of landscape moulded into shapes and marked by my own hands. However, I found the resulting pieces one dimensional, focusing more on just place, and the physical landscape and lacking in ability to express the many other layered aspects of the history and personal stories encompassed within the cillíní.



Moss collected from landscape near Dromkeare cillín





Strands of sheep/cow fleece/hair from Ballynakilly cillín



Lichen from landscape near Cill Draighneach cillín



Holly leaf skeleton from Dromkeare cillín



Experimenting with materiality of landscape, firing different soils and clay together



Hollow and semi-transparent touchstones – enclosing small amount of quartz – rattles when shaken – like a baby's rattle. Extremely fragile.



Touch – making the porcelain touchstones



Touch – finger, hand marks inscribed into the surface of the stone.



Raku fired touchstones



Experimenting with different glazes for the touchstones



Raku touchstones



Raku stones – white touchstones imprinted with hair.



2016

## Pilgrimage Walk – Walking & Sound

Pilgrimage Walk – was my first experiment with sound and spoken word – the piece used sound and spoken word to explore memory and deep-mapping of a cillín through walking. Field-recordings were woven together with threads of stories from personal memory alongside my description of the walk to Ballynakilly cillín and the making of a berry rosary and subsequent journey to a grotto.

This was a very simple work where I took a piece I had written and basically produced a sound essay where sound was secondary to the narrative. I was intrigued by the sense of place that sound gave to a listener and how a moment in time can be repeated *ad infinitum* along with the wide potential to layer sounds and words to create complexity just with sound.

Existing as just a sound piece experiment, I knew I needed to eventually look at various ways to present and make accessible work of this kind.

Sound link: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/04k7yw7azprg5zo/pilgrimage2.wav?dl=0>



The road leading to the cillín



Farm gate opening into the field before the cillín



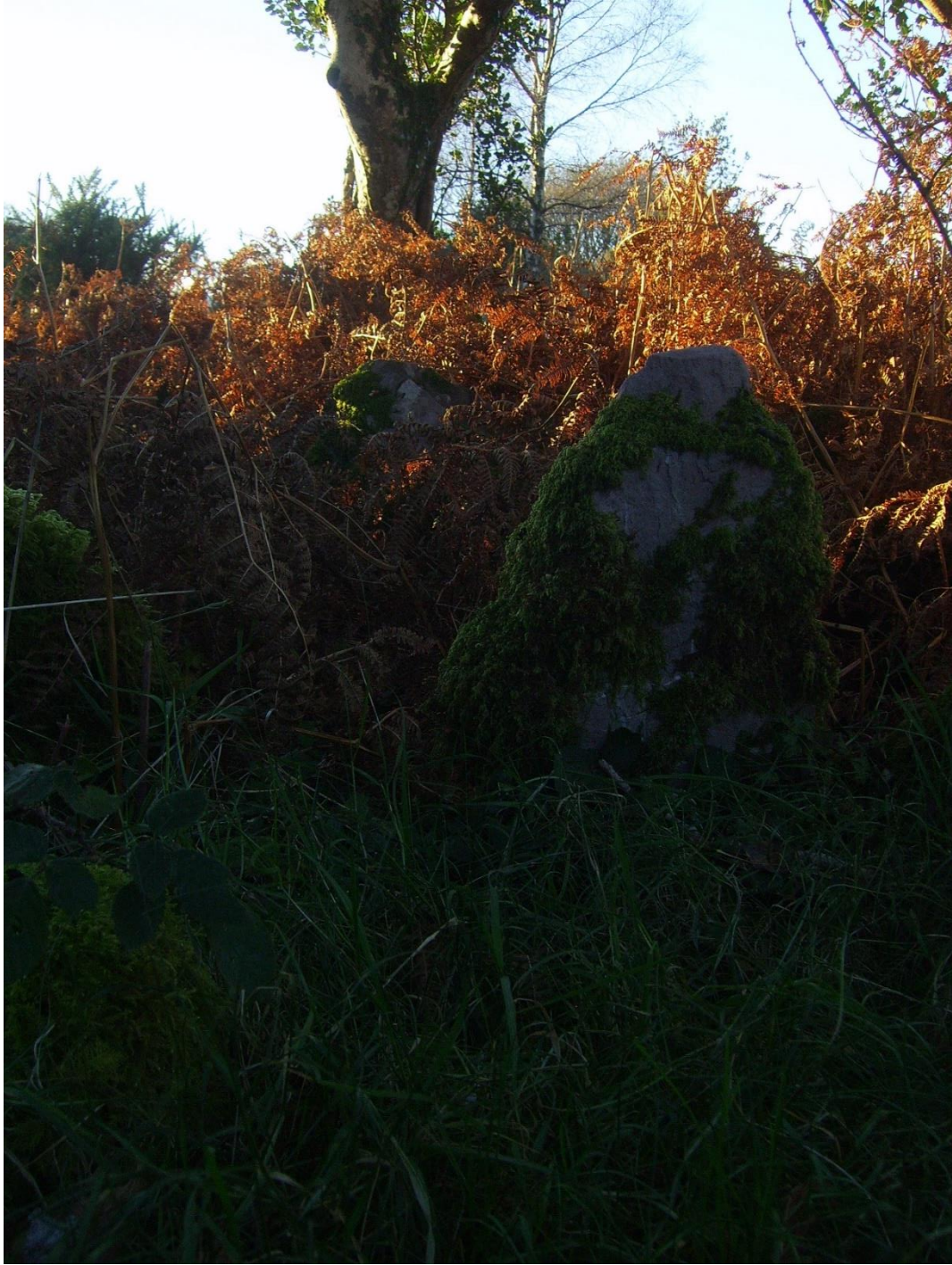
Crossing the field



Traces left of my journey to the cillín



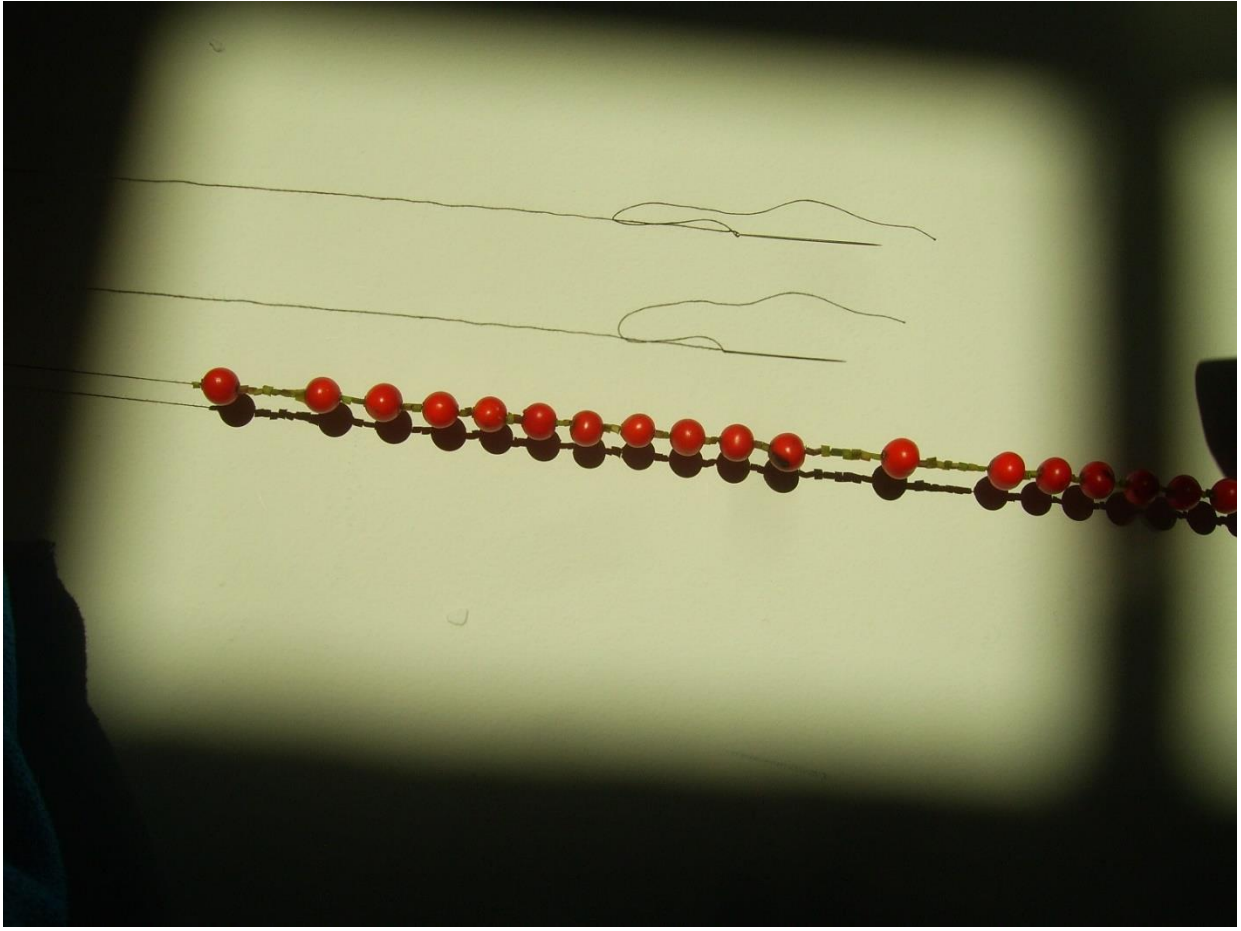
Standing just on the periphery of the site



In the cillín – uninscribed burial marker



Fallen berries in the snow from the holly trees surrounding the entrance of the cillín



Berries from the site threaded together with rush beads





Finished holly berry and rush rosary



Berry rosary at the grotto marking a holy well near Portmagee

2016

## Lullaby for Adults - Installation

*Lullaby for Adults* was an immersive installation specially designed for the Round House at *An Lab* – the Irish language theatre and gallery space in Dingle. The work was made in collaboration with film-maker/artist Angelica Kroeger and featured hundreds of paper birds cut from the local Irish newspapers. These suspended birds revolved around a pedestal supporting a large wax bowl filled with milk onto which an image of the moving sea was projected. Recorded voices in Irish spoke single words describing emotions, sea, and weather.

This piece was the first work where I started to look at the adults buried within the cillíní. The aim of the installation was to draw attention to the adults by focusing upon the collective memory of the folklore of birds as soul carriers with these individuals.

The piece was originally supposed to be about suicides buried in the cillín but after extensive research and talking with members of the local community we felt this was too intrusive and potentially too upsetting for the local community as suicide within rural Ireland is a very real issue to this day. Layers of secrecy, shame, guilt, and obvious distress cloak the subject. Even though we were looking at this from a historical perspective the spectre of suicide brings the past into sharp focus in the present as current figures in rural Ireland for suicides amongst young men is particularly high. For this reason, we focused more on the link between the cillíní and sailors and drownings.

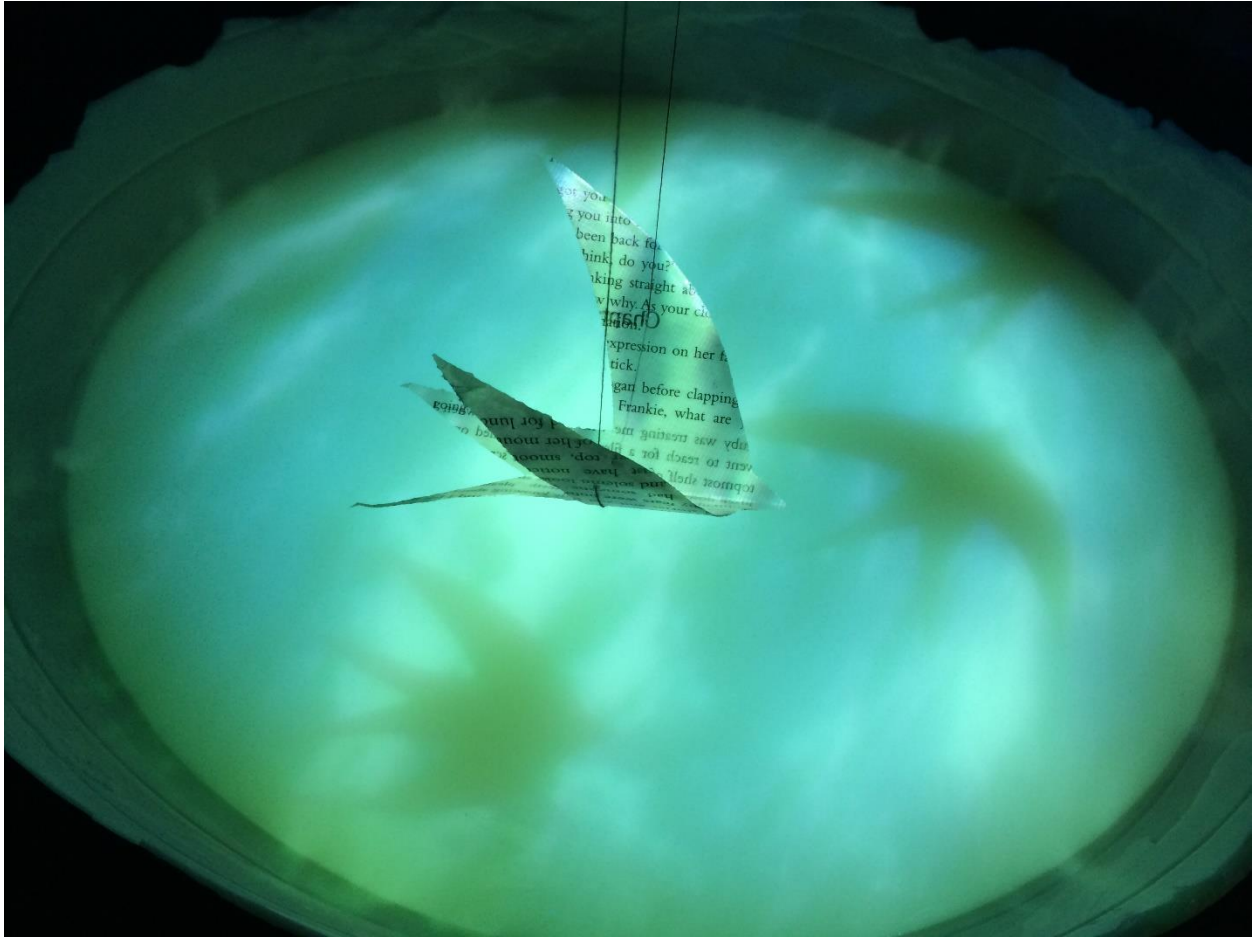
The installation was well received by the community and served as a meditative space. As this was an exhibition piece it was only open for a limited time-period and only available to those attending *Feile na Bealtaine* in person, hence, limiting the reach of the work.



Installation shot of Lullaby for Adults (photo credit Artist & Angelica Kroeger)



Installation shot of Lullaby for Adults (photo credit Artist & Angelica Kroeger)



Installation shot of Lullaby for Adults (photo credit Artist & Angelica Kroeger)

2016

## Selkies - Film 1

Series of two film experiments exploring cultural memory through folk-belief and the adults who had committed suicide buried in the cillín. Within folk-belief selkies were believed to be those who have committed suicide. Film 1 uses just stills – as seen in the following images. Once again, I played with the outside/inside – domestic space versus natural world.

Working with imagery through film was good but my lack of technical skills limited the scope for this medium as did working with a very simple film programme – Movie Maker.

As mentioned in *Lullaby for Adults*, exploring the suicides in the cillíní was potentially extremely fraught with ethical and moral issues when working directly with the local community as these sites are still within living memory and suicide an ongoing difficult subject within contemporary rural Ireland.

Film link: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/22jrbzemf999gtj/Selkie%20high%20def.MOV.mp4?dl=0>



Detail from Selkies – Film 1



Detail from Selkies – Film 1





Detail from Selkies – Film 1



Detail from Selkies – Film 1



Detail from Selkies – Film 1



Detail from Selkies – Film 1



Detail from Selkies – Film 1



Detail from Selkies – Film 1



Detail from Selkies – Film 1



Detail from Selkies – Film 1



2016

## Maighdean Mara – Film 2

Film experiment exploring the same theme as in film 1 – Selkies but this time combining moving image with stills. Clips taken from the film are seen here.

Film link: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/2zlnzogn0a0gky/maighdean%20mara%202.mp4?dl=0>



Detail from Maighdean Mara – Film 2



Detail from Maighdean Mara – Film 2



Detail from Maighdean Mara – Film 2



Detail from Maighdean Mara – Film 2



Detail from Maighdean Mara – Film 2



Detail from Maighdean Mara – Film 2



Detail from Maighdean Mara – Film 2



Detail from Maighdean Mara – Film 2





Detail from Maighdean Mara – Film 2

2017

## Phone Box – Sound

The sound piece I composed for the phone box explored the idea of memory and storying using fragments, snippets of narrative, the sounds heard painting a picture – giving clues to what is happening, what it might be about. I explored the idea of inside/outside – domestic versus the wild outdoors. Using transpositional sounds to juxtapose these binaries. The sound piece was installed as a QR code in a telephone box which as a temporary listening booth/ gallery space. After exploring inside/outside, domestic/outdoors within the two film experiments, I wanted to strip imagery away once more and create visual images in the mind of the listener using purely sound. The phone box was an experiment in finding a way of reaching a different audience out-with a traditional gallery setting. *Phone Box*, was an important step towards deciding on a medium which was transportable, could reach an audience out-with a gallery and had the power to convey mental imagery.

Sound link: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/rie9goa9m4w50ye/Phonebox.mp3?dl=0>



Phone box where sound work was accessed

2017

## Echoes from the Past - Site specific sound and performance

This was a month-long Scottish Graduate School of Arts & Humanities community artist residency at St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall researching the Orkney witch trials in the Orkney Archives.

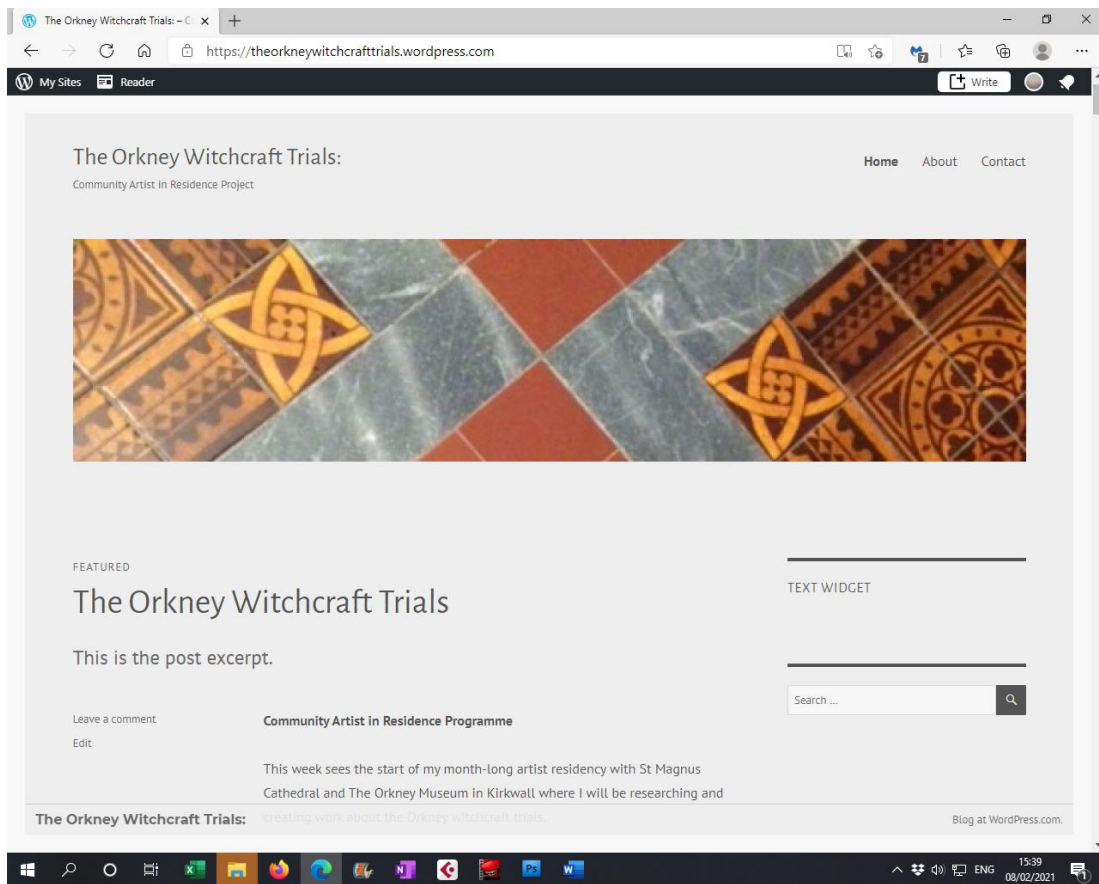
With contributions from the local community, I collected and recorded tales of traditional folk remedies, folk healings and folklore and combined these with the ambient sounds of the cathedral and the landscape of Orkney to form the basis of my site-specific sound and performance installation in the cathedral. The work explored the sonic spectral traces linking the built environment, the landscape and the accused with collective memory of a community.

This residency was a turning point in my creative practice as I had reached a point in my research into the cillíní where I felt a balance was required between my own impressions and thoughts and hearing the actual voices and thoughts of the communities in which my case studies were located. Within the residency I purposely positioned myself as a silent facilitator and let the voices of the community speak and to some extent guide the work. Through this process I realised that within my cillíní work I felt it was important that my voice be present alongside those of the local community.

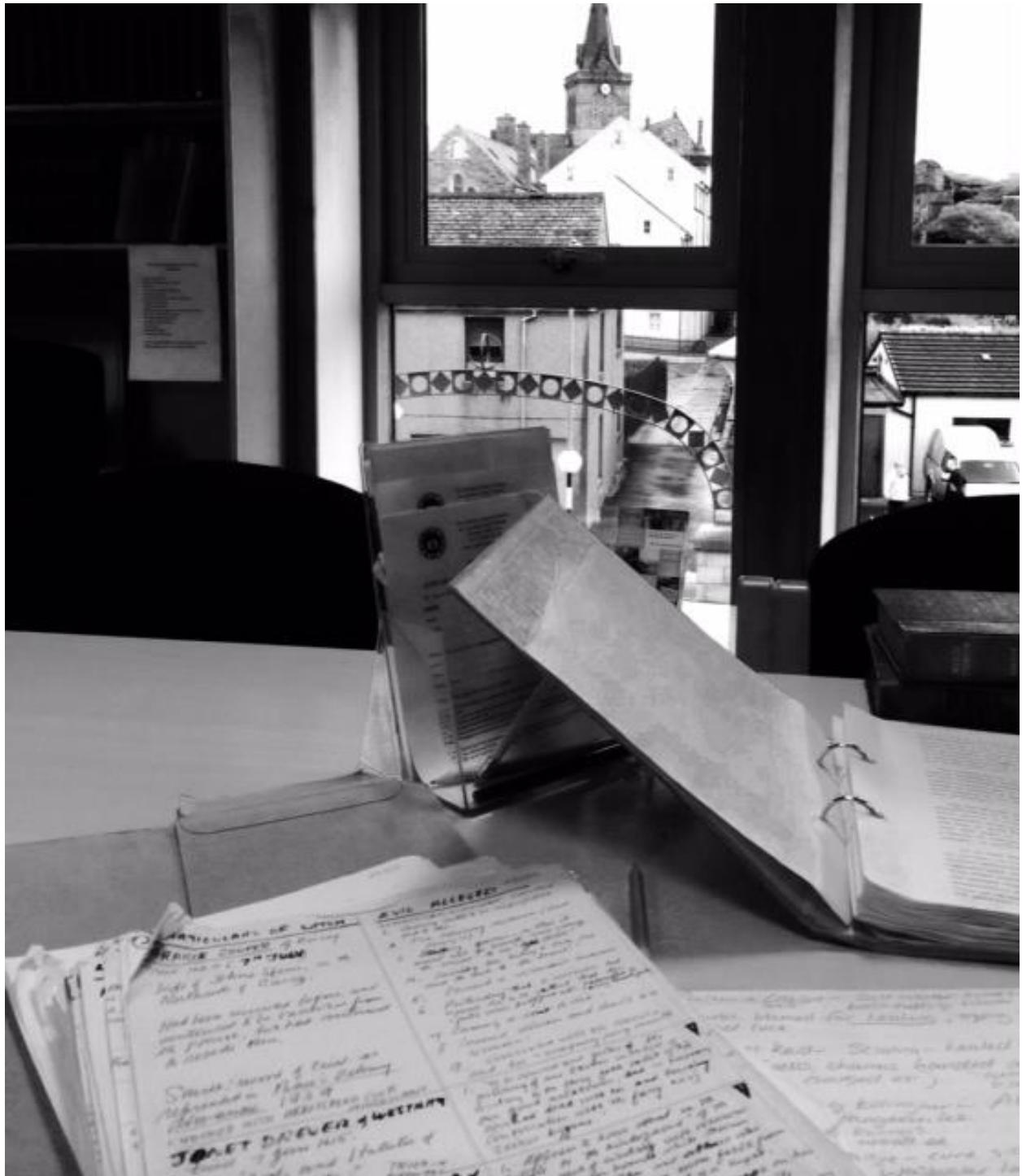
The residency was an opportunity to start to experiment with ways of working within a community I was already part of and using sound as my main medium. The residency was specifically about women, linking those accused of witch-craft with women from present day Orkney. My interest in women within the residency helped me re-position my research with the cillíní to finally focus solely upon a group of individuals I had long been interested in, the mothers who died in childbirth.

The output from the residency was a live performance combining live sound with recorded soundscapes. Once again, this form of output I found limiting to my overall research aim of creating a work which was widely accessible to as many people as possible regardless of location, time, geography or accessibility.

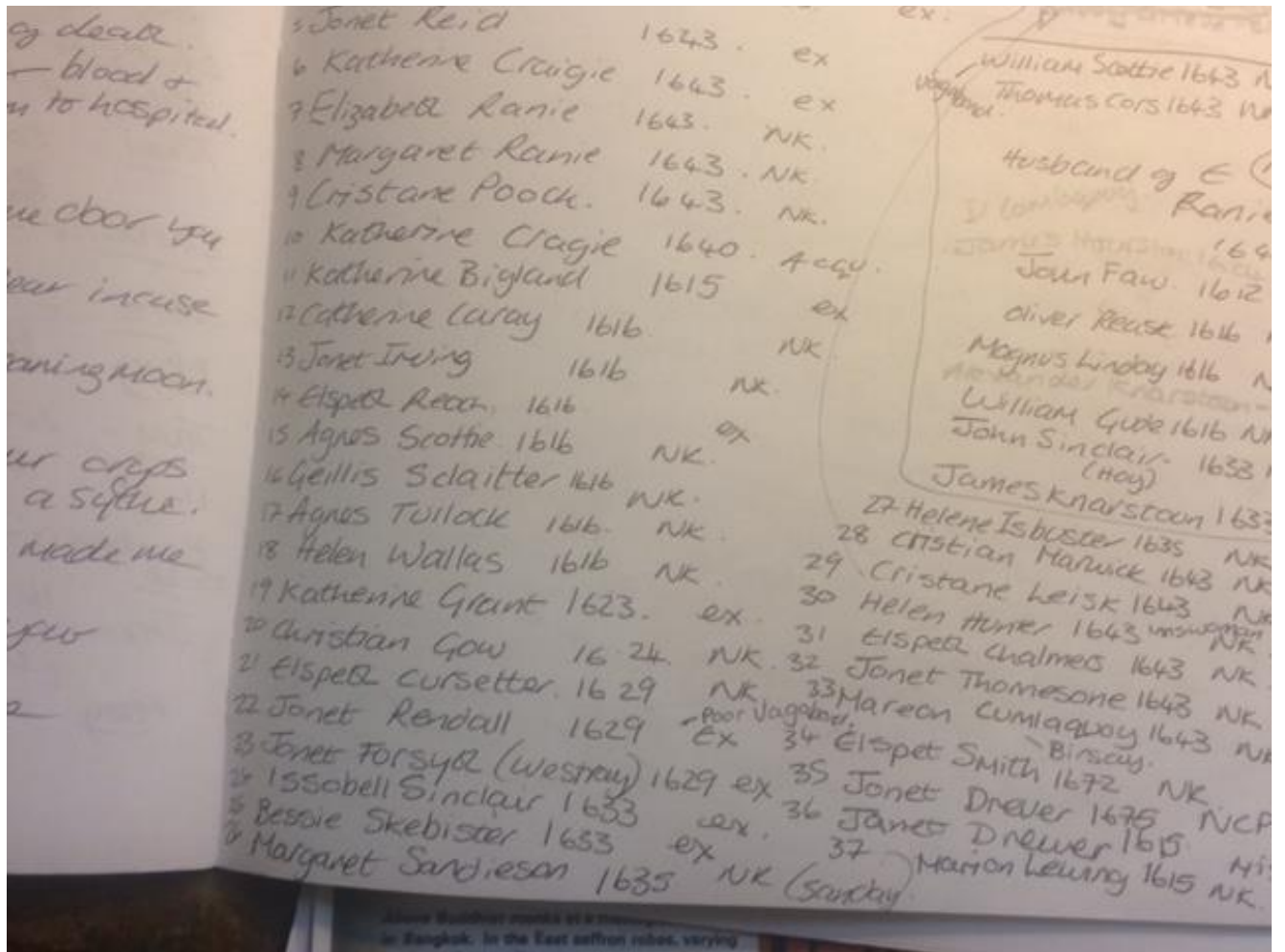
Throughout the residency I kept a public blog documenting the work.



Blog link: [The Orkney Witchcraft Trials: – Community Artist in Residence Project \(wordpress.com\)](https://theorkneywitchcrafttrials.wordpress.com)



In the Orkney archives



My written list of names of those accused of witchcraft which I collated from the archives. These names were then recited by women in the community and recorded. They were also sung in plainsong by three lay singers in the live performance.

Monday mty. - recording -

Christine - when you have a new house you always plant a lemon tree -  
 - Mary ward off evil.

Sheila → coins or shoes in the threshold -  
 there are often old shoes + I don't quite know what the thoughts - but its quite common to find in old houses -  
 - folk still put coins -  
 the bogues + demoinas -  
 people leaving babies would leave iron in the bed beside them to keep →

2:57 found an old coin in the wall its for both.

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Marilyn - M Shoe → right way around -  
 Horse ~~shoe~~ -

Christine - our granny use to give us an cented telling off for putting new shoes on the table.

Tam - to burn bread was a terrible thing.

Barbara - ~~to~~ new shoes on the table →

Tam - to pee on your warts. 7.31.

Mary Pee on chilblains. 7.39.  
 supposed to put those away.

Tam - vinegar - when we got a cough <sup>my mother</sup> use to ~~mix~~ boil up vinegar + Sugar <sup>my mother</sup> boiling ~~water~~ it worked.

Barbara - a mustard poultice on your chest.  
 you mixed it up with hot water.

Jean - 16:34 Slowly sucking 1/2 a lemon it softens the bone -

Mary I've heard of ~~that~~ vinegar for that.

Notes from my focus group meeting and recording with a group of local women discussing handed-down folk beliefs.

use to mention the minister.

~~Barbara~~  
 Barbara - they never talk about Salmon on a boat.  
 19.23

Sheila - A minister was bad luck & going on a  
 19.29. boat with a minister.

~~Mary~~  
 20-01 - Barbara - + you don't whistle on a boat.  
 Sheila - + the boat <sup>you</sup> must <sup>have to</sup> turn the right way.  
 20.14. + you mustn't go against the Sun.

20-26 <sup>Christine</sup>  
 they gave me a telling off for going  
 round the garden the wrong way -

20-55  
 22-35. <sup>Marilyn</sup> you never open an umbrella in someone's  
 house -  
 23.03. + I remember get a black umbrella.  
 when - about the telegram. came in.

23-55. <sup>Mary</sup> pearls - a present <sup>they were</sup> ~~are~~ a sign of death.  
 Mary + Barbara + Marilyn

24-14. <sup>Christine</sup> Red + white flowers - together - blood +  
 bandages - you'd never take them to hospital.

27.00 feathers on a doorstep  
 27.44 - Mary - bad luck to go out some door you  
 came in.

28.18 - Barbara - big cleaning at New Year incense  
 Devils lurking -

28.32 <sup>Christine</sup> Never start a project with a waning moon.  
 28-50 <sup>Sheila</sup> You'd get married on a Friday -

29-10. You wouldn't start cutting your crops  
 on a Friday etc if it meant on a sabbath.

30-05. <sup>Sheila</sup> Rain was for riches then - he made me  
 Sheila go out -

30.35 there was a day you shouldn't cut your  
 toenails.

27.14 <sup>Mary</sup> - I've heard that bairns will see  
 things.

Notes from focus group





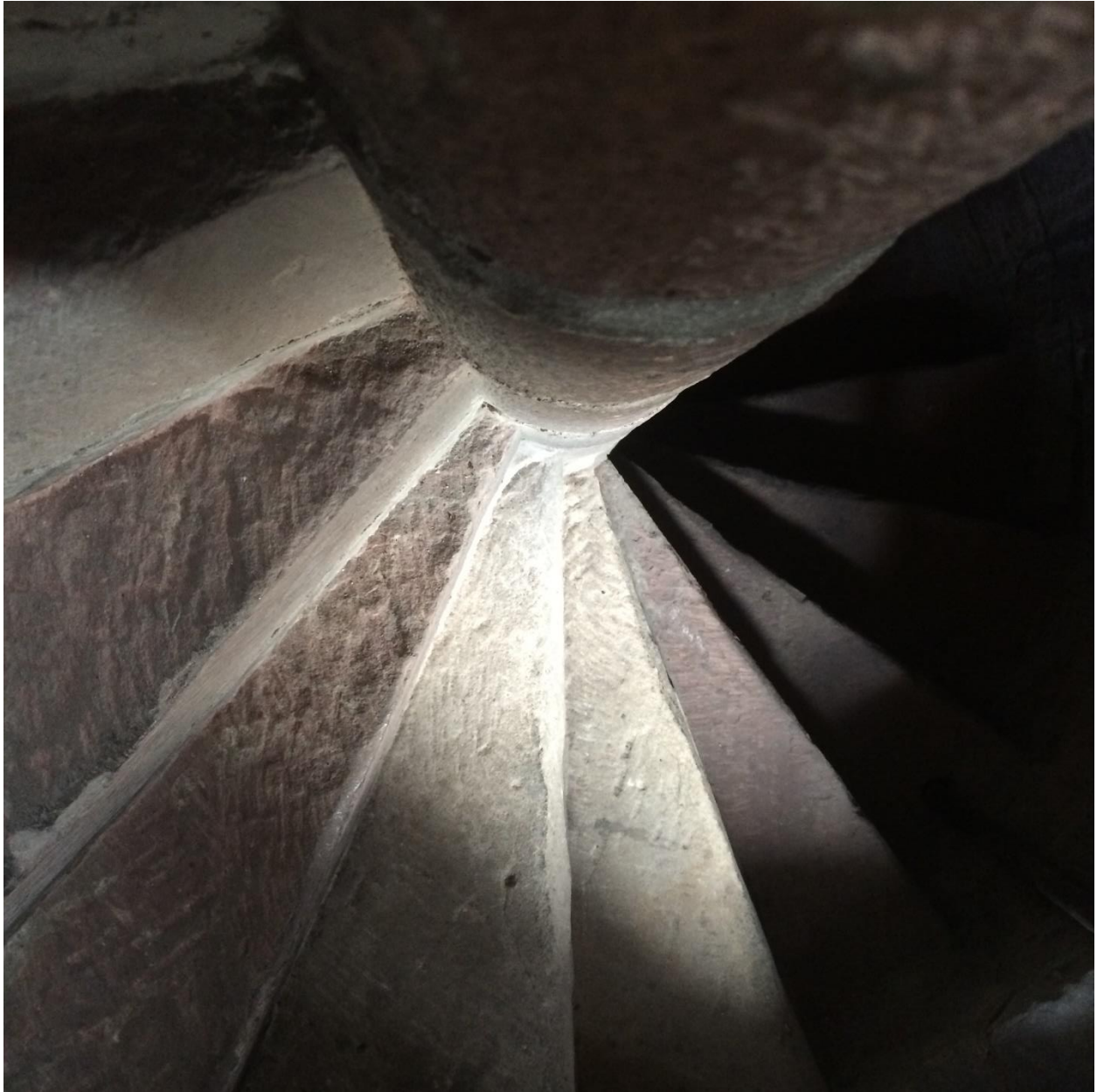
In Marwick's Hole – in St Magnus Cathedral – where the accused were kept.



Recording the sound of Magnus – the bell.



Magnus



Recording sound of footsteps going up the stone staircase in the cathedral leading to the trial room.



Recording a Sunday service high above the choir.



Recording Swallow song in South Ronaldsay where several of the accused women came from.



Recording the sound of the sea down at St Peter's Kirk in Burwick – South Ronaldsay where another of the accused lived and was accused by the local people and minister.



Clips from the public performance of Echoes from the Past.

Link: <https://soundcloud.com/sheena-graham-george/echoes-from-the-past-extract/s-HOjmh>





Three lay singers performed from the archway above the congregation.



Marwick's Hole – light projection of water.



St Magnus Cathedral Custodian in Marwick's Hole— performed a lament she composed for the women accused.

Link : <https://www.dropbox.com/s/adivn6tbr0xa3j6/fran%20fiddle%203.wav?dl=0>

2019

## The Homeless Dead – Site-specific

These experiments in the landscape were about cultural memory and folk belief – the spirit lights which are often mentioned in Irish folk belief. The siting of these hand-stitched houses was near a cillín at Cill Rialaig and the work was carried out during dusk/ twilight – the inbetween time – a limbo time.

During this period of experimentation working site-specifically and with film, I was focusing purely upon imagery about women and their domestic role and being cast-out in death from the home – inside/outside again. I was considering using the sound work within an installation featuring these images, lights and houses. However, I once again found the idea of an installation not satisfactory for my needs, in that it would exist for a specific time in a particular geographic location, not as widely accessible as I required or potentially easily portable. Working through these various experiments further confirmed for me the power of using just sound rather than imagery to incorporate the layers of complexity about my research subject.



Beside the cillín at Cill Rialaig



The Homeless Dead - 1



The Homeless Dead 2



The Homeless Dead 3





Installation of candle lights – Homeless Dead



Installation of candle lights – Homeless Dead

2019

## Film – The Homeless Dead I

Two sketchbook film pieces filmed on location in Cill Rialaig, Iveragh County Kerry. The films explore the ideas of women/ home/ domesticity – against the backdrop of Van Gennep's homeless dead – without hearth or home. Clips from the films show the layering of outside over inside. For these films I used Lightworks which gave me a greater control and complexity of image. However, once again my own technical ability was not advanced enough to fulfil my ideas visually.

Link: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/9fvb5jcs6acqlzq/Sprit%20house%201.mp4?dl=0>



Detail from – The Homeless Dead I



Detail from – The Homeless Dead I



Detail from – The Homeless Dead I



Detail from – The Homeless Dead I



Detail from – The Homeless Dead I



Detail from – The Homeless Dead I



2019

## Sketchbook film 2

Link: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/62y6r5wxqlug4ik/three%281%29.mp4?dl=0>



Detail from Sketchbook Film 2



Detail from Sketchbook Film 2



Detail from Sketchbook Film 2



Detail from Sketchbook Film 2



Detail from Sketchbook Film 2



Detail from Sketchbook Film 2



Detail from Sketchbook Film 2

2019

## Spirit Houses - Socially engaged project

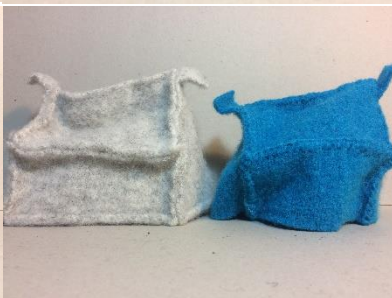
A trial of a socially engaged project with women in my local community in Orkney – slowly creating my hand knitted, felted homes in memory of the homeless dead women.

The original plan for this work was to trial it in Orkney then engage remotely with groups of women in Ireland. Not living in the community of my research area proved problematic in networking with groups and forging links with women's groups and organisations. All of these factors taking time to establish. Within my timeframe this was not possible. I was also once again faced with the issues I have already highlighted around installations. Producing this work again made me more certain that sound was the correct medium to fulfil my research aims.

However, as a result of the trial, I realised that this would be a good standalone community project for the future, which would involve working face to face with groups and where dialogue between participants would be perhaps even more important than the finished output.









Community made felt houses