

# Save Our Stories Celebration Of Oral History In Achill

**Fáilte - Welcome**

**Wed 16<sup>th</sup> Aug 2023 Ashleam School**

**Facilitator: Dr Angela Maye-Banbury, Senior Lecturer In Oral History**

**Sheffield Hallam University**

**Founder & Chairperson: Achill Oral Histories**





Funded by  
An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council



Save  
Our  
Stories



## A CELEBRATION OF ORAL HISTORY IN ACHILL ISLAND

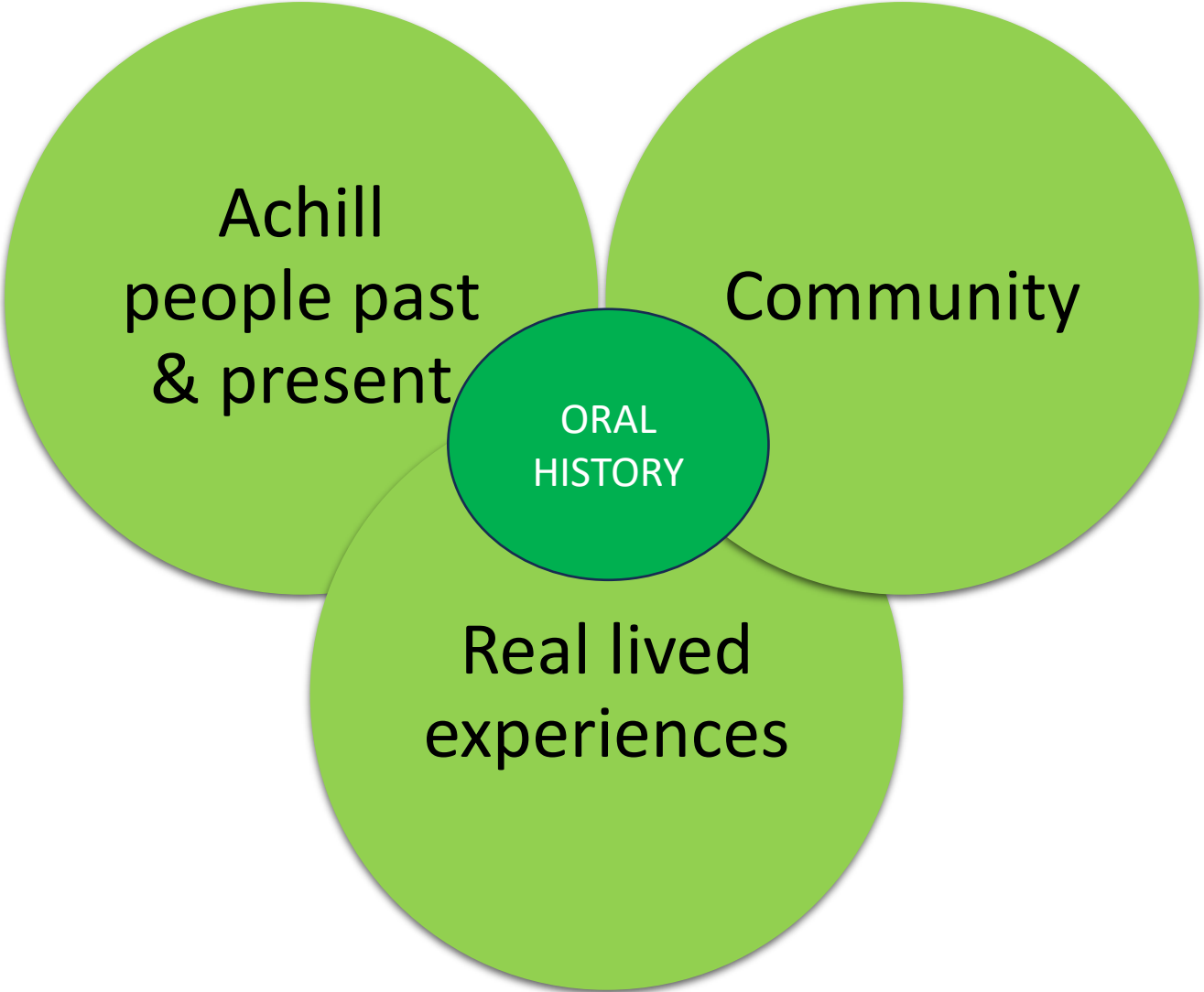
WEDNESDAY 16<sup>th</sup> August 2023 10 a.m. – 14.00 hrs  
ASHLEAM OLD SCHOOL ACHILL ISLAND F28 DY03

FREE TEA, COFFEE & BISCUITS FOR ALL

For further information, contact Dr Angela Maye-Banbury Oral Historian

[info@achilloralhistories.com](mailto:info@achilloralhistories.com)

# Today Is A Celebration



# Overview of the workshop weekend

**MORNING 10.00 hrs – 12.30 hrs**

Welcome and introductions

About Achill Oral Histories (AMB)

Community panel discussion (ALL)

Ashleam Centenary 2024 (AMB)

Community action planning: the value of oral history and working together to preserve Achill's history.

Break 12.30

**AFTERNOON 13.00 hrs – 14.00 hrs**

Recordings in progress

Children's Corner: My Achill, my home

Community recordings

Stronger together – next steps



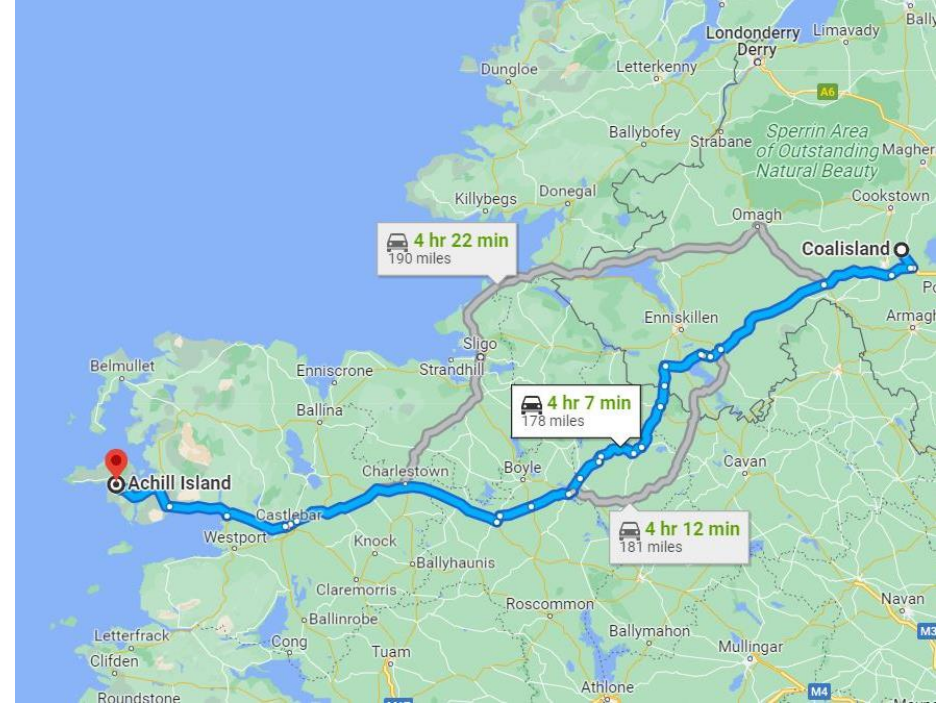
MORNING

# PLACE, MEMORY & MEANING

# From Coalisland To Achill Island – My Own Journey 1976



“  
We look at the world once in  
childhood. The rest is memory.”  
Louise Glück : ‘Nostos’.



# Professionalism in oral history

- Achill Oral Histories is a strictly not for profit organisation.
- Governed by strict ethical practices of the Oral History Network Of Ireland, the British Oral History Society and the Oral History Association.
- The changes to oral history practice 1985 – 2023: from Ediphone, reel to digital.







## Ethics & oral history in Achill

**Ethics, trust and voluntary  
contribution.**

**Being explicit about the  
parameters of oral history.**

**Managing expectations.**

**Always deliver.**

# Defining oral history

“A deliberate effort to collect and use oral information for the purpose of historical reconstruction” (Kwong, 1992: 21).

“The interviewing of eyewitness participants about in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction” also informed the study (Grele, 1996: 63).

"Memory is the core of oral history from which meaning can be extracted (my emphasis) and preserved. Put simply, oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews" (Richie, 2014: 1).

# Benefits of oral history

- We are hard wired to share our stories .‘Neurons that fire together, wire together.’ When we hear a good story, whether factually based or otherwise, our brains actually light up causing the neurons to fuse together. This process is known as ‘neuron coupling.’
- Created a ‘shared authority’ by preserving and combining memories of the past.
- Enhanced empathy.
- Intergenerational understanding.
- Helps community cohesion.
- May be used for research and other creative endeavours.

# What happens if we don't record life stories

- We lose important aspects of culture and heritage with everyday experiences consigned to the margins of history or are lost forever.
- History is rewritten by others, namely the victors.
- Current and future generations have limited or no insights into how things were in the past.
- We lose language and dialect as Gaeilge.

# Oral history as 'equipment for living.'

- Unique stories which people use to frame their worlds; chronology of events less important than the events people choose to recount.
- Story telling as "equipment for living" to frame life's events (Burke, 1973).
- Narratives are stories people tell about their lives" (Bruner, 1987).
- Ontological quality - narratives as an essential part of being (Brody, 2002)

# 'Shared authority' built through trust

Oral history seeks to readdress imbalance of power between interviewer and interviewee to create a "shared authority" (Frisch, 1990)

"A good interview is only achievable if there is mutual trust and rapport between the people involved" (Oral History Society, 2016).

"Trust is the foundation for acquiring the fullest, most accurate disclosure a respondent is able to make. . . . In an effective interview, both researcher and respondent feel good, rewarded and satisfied by the process and the outcomes. The warm and caring researcher is on the way to achieving such effectiveness" (Gleshne & Peshkin, 1992, p 87).

# The 'extraordinary ordinary' - hidden voices and forgotten stories

- Preservation of eyewitness accounts for future posterity.
- Seeks to give the interviewee status and enhance capital: build a "shared authority" between interviewer and interviewee (Frisch, 1990).
- Portelli (1989:21), oral sources 'tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did... Subjectivity is as much the business of history as the more visible "facts" ...'



ACHILL ORAL HISTORIES

# About Achill Oral Histories(1)

- Achill Oral Histories is a strictly not for profit organisation founded in Oct 2017  
Member of Mayo County Council PPN , The Wheel.
- THE everyday extraordinary.
- Bottom - up genesis: evolved from discussions with members of the community.
- Two key objectives:
  - (i) The recording and curation of the life histories of the people of Achill past and present.
  - (ii) The promotion of oral history related transferable competencies and skills to support employability especially for all . Enabling volunteers set and achieve their individual strategic development goals through oral history.



# About Achill Oral Histories (2)

- Community centred ethos.
- Based as Ashleam National School with public engagement sessions every Wed.
- Our 'Introduction to Oral History' workshop on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2023.
- Awarded first grant from the Heritage Council May 2023 for €3,180. Working with Leicester University EMOHA
- Heritage Week showcase 16<sup>th</sup> August 2023.



UNIVERSITY OF  
LEICESTER



# WE WARMLY INVITE YOU TO SHARE YOUR MEMORIES OF ACHILL LIFE AS PART OF A NEW ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



EVERY WEDNESDAY 10.00 – 17.00 ASHLEAM OLD SCHOOL ACHILL ISLAND F28 DY03  
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[www.achilloralhistories.com](http://www.achilloralhistories.com) PPN registration no 01376

elp preserve Achill's unique history now and forever



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# Progress to data

- Completion of 10 oral histories with 5 live and remainder in progress.
- Audio recordings available for play back.
- Verbatim transcripts produced.
- Well resourced web site [www.achilloralhistories.com](http://www.achilloralhistories.com)
- ‘Introduction to oral History’ workshop on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2023.

# Next stages

- August – Oct 2023 - completion of transcripts from existing recordings.
- Quality assurance of recordings.
- Preparing for next phase of interviews.

How do you envisage the oral histories of Achill Island being used?



In what other ways do you envisage the oral histories of Achill Island being used?

# Achill Memory Drop Box

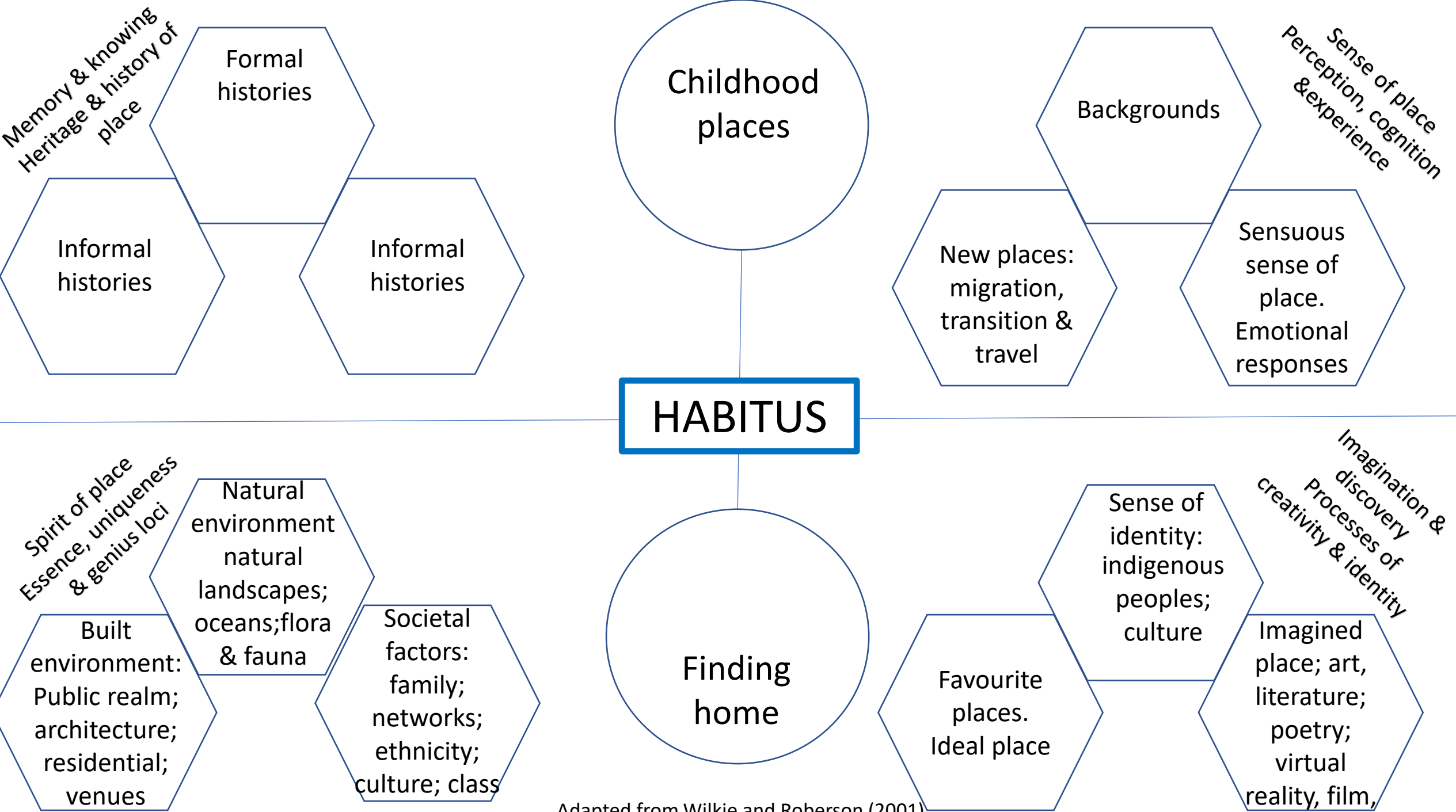


# Some emerging themes...

An island full of untold stories which celebrate the 'extraordinary ordinary.' Emergent themes from Achill Oral Histories include:

- The profound impact of immigration and 'loss of life': tragedy and 'tattie hoking' in Scotland and mass emigration to Cleveland Ohio, USA and Britain.
- The enduring legacy of the Great Hunger.
- Living alongside the seasons and landscape:
- The farmers, retailers, tourist industry; essential services; the women of Achill; young people in Achill, the older population
- Depth of attachment to place for those who reside in Achill and those who have left.
- The sense of togetherness: communities working together.
- An Achill of the future.





Adapted from Wilkie and Roberson (2001)

THE VALUE OF ORAL HISTORY:  
COMMUNITY PANEL DISCUSSION

ASHLEAM NATIONAL SCHOOL  
CENTENARY 2024

WORKING TOGETHER

# Your suggestions



Exercise 2: How can we work together using oral history to help further reveal Achill's sense of place?

LUNCH



AFTERNOON

**GOOD AFTERNOON**

## RECORDING IN PROGRESS

My memories of Achill with Angela Maye-Banbury  
Children's Corner: My Achill My home, with Ash Mc  
Greal



Recording in progress



STRONGER TOGETHER