The objective of this thesis is to explore theatrical space and the cultural relationship of materials as they are experienced by people in rural Ireland. The method involved the investigation of five handball alleys in Co. Mayo, the identification of materials and the location of the sources of those materials. The results found that one of these handball alleys was part of an urban arrangement of theatrical spaces. The alley was no longer in use, in a state of disrepair and the materiality experience was lost due to the ivy covering the walls. I propose for this project a reuse of the site as a theatre with poetry with an associated playwright hostel, using this to explore a phenomenological approach to design through the relationship of old and new materials with reference to past and present culture.
Irish culture is renowned for its performers in sport, music and dance. Theatrical space involves a relationship between the performer and the spectator is an integral part of Irish culture. There can also be a type of theatrical space in the day to day life of a street, city or town. My “material culture” research involves a study of Irish handball alleys. These are a common typology in many Irish towns and villages. The ‘big alleys’ are unique to Ireland; they are designed as a theatrical space with the position of the spectators considered as important as the two players of the game. When a game was being played the noise and emotion of the cheering crowd, enclosed by the high walls, would create an electric atmosphere.

The architectural form I am interested in investigating is this theatrical space. Also to further develop this investigation by exploring the relationship between the theatrical nature of the streets and the sports arena.

The texture of the walls of a handball alley contrasts between the court side and the outer side. A smooth flat court side surface contrasts with a rough and ruin-like outer surface. The light plays with these contrasting surfaces indicating the path of the sun, passing time and changing weather. The local stone is used as aggregate in these concrete structures, resulting in simple walls evoking a strong connection to the local landscape, culture, locality, materials and crafts.

I strive to go beyond seeing or viewing materials as just a engineered product required for construction. I hope to establish an emotional response; a sense of attachment; belonging; a relationship with the new as if it has always been there. This philosophical interest is explored by learning how people perceive the space around them and how people develop a sense of place. This is not only created by the materials, it is also the relationship of volume and mass of built forms to the surrounding landscape. However for the purpose of this study my interest is in the material aspect of sense of place.

Culture evolves and changes over time. The architecture of the locality should reflect these cultural changes. This will give new architecture a strong connection to local identity through its past culture and also by reflecting the present. My investigations are based on developing the design process that will connect culture, time and place.

The use of current building technology is an important part of connecting with the present. My investigation into modern building techniques in contemporary architecture uses precedent studies to develop a better understanding of the methods available today.

My thesis research investigates the dual nature of theatrical space, the physical properties of local materials, the subjective relationship to place through local material and modern developments in building technology.

Notes:
2. “The term “material culture” is often used by archaeologists as a non-specific way to refer to the artefacts or other concrete things left by past cultures.” accessed March 3, 2011, http://archaeology.about.com/od/intro/g/material_cultur.htm
In my early projects I was interested in texture and how texture responds to light. I designed and produced an initial concept model during the first week of the year. When side lit, the shadows and highlights of the textured surface were more dramatic. From this initial interest my three primer projects all had a strong interest in texture, lighting and materiality. This interest was developed further by research into construction materials available in Co. Mayo. The material research was developed in parallel with the handball alley investigations.

At the start of the first semester a series of short primer projects were undertaken to test the thesis ideas. The brief for the Shannon project was to design a cold storage facility at a site located at Shannon airport. The site was the original water harbour landing area for seaplanes. Over the years sand and silt has built up, at low tide water reeds now cover the majority of the site and at high tide the site is filled with water.

The first idea I tested in this project involved a study of farm-shed construction to try to connect my proposal in some way with the local context and culture. This developed into a second test which involved a study of the water reeds on the site as the inspiration for a new type of structure that references nature rather than an existing architectural typology. The new type of structural system uses vertical elements and smaller secondary elements horizontally. The material idea was to use separate materials to distinguish the horizontal from the vertical elements. ‘Steel’ was used for the vertical structure to contrast with the natural part of the site, the material idea of contrasting a man made industrial material surrounded by nature was tested.

The storage units were located away from the drop off area so the fork lift drivers would experience the weather and the environment throughout their working day. Public access was introduced to test the idea of public space. The public experience the landscape from the enclosed aspect of walking through the reeds and the spectator could climb public stairways to observe the landscape from a height.

Some of the comments at the review were: the project could have looked at how the structure would change over time. The experience as you move through the reeds could have had points where people would slow down. The project could have more relationship to other built objects in the landscape like the tanks, airport, houses, etc. The idea of contrasting the natural and synthetic was said to be too simplistic and it could have explored blurring the edges between the two.

I ask myself what is the idea really? And conclude that a cultured response to my idea would be to research handball alleys.
Hamburg

The brief asked to look specifically at the future of The Hafen area of Hamburg and to propose a series of actions in time that might be implemented over the next 150 years that will alter the future shape of The Hafen and its context in Hamburg.

My starting point for the project was my experience of the culture and the place. In Hamburg the people enjoy the beauty of functional objects like bridges, warehouses and musical instruments. The Hafen area of Hamburg is an area that has recently being renewed. It was originally used as industrial docks and storage. It has been renewed as an upmarket office and residential area. It is where the new philharmonic is located. The philharmonic is an acoustic space mainly for the upper class, where there is an entry charge.

An area of old brick storage buildings is called Speicherstadt. The character of this area is defined by the use of material. Brick rises out of the water to form five story high storage buildings with lifting cranes fixed to the facade. Iron bridges form walkways over the water at various heights.

My concept for my proposal developed from walking through the site and relating it back to my Shannon project. The bridges and roads from Hafen city back to the city centre were all direct routes with not many place to stop and sit or to slow down. I was thinking how this journey could be slowed down for a pedestrian by proposing a meeting place for the public. My idea was a new type of public space that proposed an acoustic space for all. The sites for my proposals were the spaces between both existing and proposed buildings in the city. The project aims to tune the facades between buildings to create a new type of public space. An acoustically tuned surface that relates to the public space, the city and the people. The spaces are a route between buildings and also a place for the people to gather. A series of meeting points that allow for moments of release as you move through the city. The spaces allow for multiple functions and uses, such as dance, story telling and all types of music. These points will form a new type of relationship between the people and the city. This new typology of public space could be incorporated into new buildings as the city develops into the future.

This last project highlighted my interest in theatrical space. In chapter one I will describe the development of this interest through my research into the idea of theatre in everyday life and also my three recent theatrical experiences.
There were a number of books and architecture projects that were of interest to me before I began to research handball alleys. These were the book “Thinking Long” by Liam Kelly, and the book “On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture” by Setha Low. Two built projects I was interested in were the Altes Museum by Schinkel and the Staatsgalerie by Sterling.

In Liam Kelly’s book “Thinking Long” I was interested in the work of the artist Locky Morris particularly his installation titled ‘Town, Country and People’. Liam Kelly describes the intention of the artist to ‘objectify the routine experience of military surveillance by helicopters, which daily hover over ‘active’ sections of a town like Derry.’ These works are of interest to me as they objectify an ordinary event in the town which is part of the daily life of the place. In “Town, Country and People” three cone shaped objects with images of ground and sky sit on the gallery floor, a small surveillance helicopter is on the top of each cone. It’s like the helicopters are beaming a light onto the ground and the shape of the light is rendered with the space it is illuminating. Surveillance helicopters are viewing activity on the ground. This is of interest to me because it is a daily theatrical event that is part of the life of the town.

Setha Low in her book “On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture” describes her 15 year project researching public spaces in San Jose, Costa Rica. She studied the sociology of the plaza and “how culture acts to shape public space”. Setha Low describes her observations of the people. She describes how people are using the space, she inquires into their reasons for being there, documents this with photographs and includes movement maps at different times of the day. This book was of interest to me for its descriptions of how people use a space and also Setha Low’s method of how she observes the place. Her method of first hand engagement with the people goes beyond just looking at the place on a map.

In my axonometric drawings of the public route of the Altes Museum by Schinkel and the Staatsgalerie by Sterling I am exploring the condition of theatrical space in an urban condition. I am exploring the performance of everyday life. Schinkel’s building entrance could be interpreted as a stage where the people entering the museum become the actors. However there is also an ambiguity between these two spaces. The viewer could also be the viewed. In the Staatsgalerie by Stirling the circular space is part of a public route through the site and this could be thought of as another room in the gallery. The work on display in this room however is the everyday people of the city who are viewed as they walking through.

The method I used for this investigation was axonometric drawings, I used them as a tool to explore these two projects. I also used axonometric drawings in my investigations of the five handball alleys as part of my thesis research in Co. Mayo, where I used them to explore the form and the relationship of the handball alley to the public street.
fig. 6 - Altes Museum
fig. 7 - Staatsgalerie
My investigation into theatres involved first hand experience of three music concerts. Each concert was a different sized venue which gave me an overview of theatrical space. Outside I was interested in how you arrive and where you wait or queue. Then once inside the venue I was interested in the capacity, the materials, the sound quality and the relationship between the spectator and the performer.

On February 24th 2011 the band ‘Maroon 5’ played at the Grand Canal Theatre in Dublin. The theatre was built as part of the Dublin docklands development. “The DDDA appointed world renowned architect Daniel Libeskind, theatre architects RHWL and Developer Chartered Land to build this landmark building”.

Arriving at night you see the distinctive red lights that are part of the landscaping of the square in front of the main entrance to the theatre. The glass facade allows the internal space to connect with the external square. Once inside you enter a reception area with stairs connecting multiple levels and a drinks bar at each level. Facade, reception, stairs and drinks bar are all incorporated into one multi level space. You can get a drink and look back out over the square outside. I observed the square below with teenagers dressed in black taking photos of themselves with the red lights. “Drinks can’t be taken into the theatre” called the steward as we were called to take our seats. Moving from the drinks bar to the theatre the light changed from bright to dark and it takes a moment for my eyes to adjust. The theatre seating area has a capacity for 2000 - the atmosphere and sound quality was amazing and Maroon 5 gave a great performance.

My next theatre experience was a solo Spanish guitarist playing in a Basilica in Barcelona. This was a much more intimate setting and it was a short performance for an audience of approximately 75 people. The audience were told when we bought our ticket to start queuing about 15 minutes before the start of the concert. We formed a queue in the narrow pedestrian lane that led up to the entrance to the Basilica. Shops along the cobbled street began to close, providing a sense of transition from daytime activity to night time activity. Anticipation began to grow as we waited to be let in to the theatrical space. Once inside we were led into a side chapel adjacent to the main Basilica. It was quite dark but the dim light highlighted the rough texture of the old stone walls. A single wooden chair was on the altar waiting for the arrival of the guitarist. The atmosphere was quiet and spooky which complimented the sounds and melodies of the performer. At this theatre the venue itself was an important part of creating the overall atmosphere of the experience of darkness and sound.

‘The Script’ played at the O2 in Dublin on the 10th of March 2011 to an audience of 16,000. To get to the venue we had the option to take the train or walk and because it was a dry night we decided to walk. The route took us along the river, the new docklands developments were
reflecting in the water and the illuminated curves of the new Aviva stadium were glowing in the background. Inside the venue the lobby was bare and small and we moved quickly through into the theatre area. There were a number of bars and merchandise shops at the back of the standing area. Anywhere you stood there was a great view of the stage which was raised to about the spectators eye level. Lighting rigs were above the stage and large video screens hung on either side. Moving around during the concert was easy and exiting at the end of the show was also fast - considering the size of the crowd.

This chapter focused on an interest in program of theatrical space. In the next chapter I will discuss the development of my material research from both the physical properties and also the phenomenological aspect of how materials are experienced.
My material research developed from my investigation into handball alleys. I am interested in the physical properties of materials such as texture, colour and how light interacts with a material. I am also interested in how the use of material creates a sense of place - considering the experience of building materials and their sensory properties which I will discuss in the next section. First, I will discuss the physical characteristics of materials.

Handball alleys were built using local materials available at the time they were constructed. As part of my handball alley research I looked at what materials are available today in Co. Mayo. This study provided me with a better understanding of the local topography and environment.

The maps of the bedrock and soil types of Ireland formed the basis for my research. I also investigated forestry plantation maps and tree types to learn what type of trees would be best suited to the area. The material culture of the locality of an area is primarily influenced by the bedrock of that area. Stone would be considered to be a parent material and stone is a factor in the creation or manufacture of all materials. To trace the link from stone to timber, we look at the bedrock type which would be one of the factors that determines the type of soil which was formed on the surface over the rock. This soil is a factor in determining the types of trees that will grow in an area. A bedrock of shale and fireclay is required to make bricks. Metal is mined from deposits in stone and glass is made from silica found in sand. Using this information, I searched the internet for stone quarries located in Mayo and then I travelled to them to collected samples of the stone from the quarry. I photographed the quarries and my stone samples to explore how the material interacts with light and documented this by relating them back to the bedrock map. The result of this is on the following page.

By looking at the bedrock map of Ireland I began to consider County Mayo in the context of Ireland and Ireland in the context of its geographic position in the north Atlantic. I thought about the physical effects of the production materials on the global ecosystem.

I investigated the north Atlantic to learn about its influence on the climate of Ireland. The gulf stream influences temperature and the movement of weather systems. The north Atlantic also influences global climate because just off the coast of Ireland is one of the largest CO2 sinks on the planet, microscopic plants bloom in the spring and feed on the minerals that have been brought up to the surface by winter storms. Relating this back to the area of my investigation I conclude that any pollution running off the land and into the rivers in Co. Mayo could flow into the Atlantic and effect on the growth of these microscopic plants. I consider the importance of the global ecosystem and try to learn about how the natural environment works. I now better appreciate the importance of the global ecosystem and how the natural environment works. We need to better understand the relationship between the various levels in nature and how even small changes at one level can have significant knock on effects that can result in large scale effects.
Considering materials in relation to phenomenology involves “the experience of building materials and their sensory properties.”

Relating this back to my research into handball alleys I speculate that the use of local materials and local labour in the building of the handball alleys resulted in the alley being more appreciated and valued by people. I consider the process of construction and the materials used to be important in the phenomenological experience of the buildings materials.

I was interested in how to describe new ways of looking at places that goes beyond the visual. A standard map produces a generic image of a place and I was interested in finding new ways to describe the place. I was searching for a tool that describes the phenomenological aspect of building materials. I found a book in the library on phenomenology, “cityscapes” by Ben Highmore. My interest in this book in relation to my thesis research is in the methods Highmore uses to describe the city. Highmore makes the argument for “the need for more inventive and exploratory preliminary investigations into how cities have been experienced, how the city has a hold on the imagination and what some of the coordinates of this ‘lived imaginary’ are”.

Highmore investigates new ways of describing the city. His aim is not to rush to ‘explain and summarize’ but to describe the city in a way that isn’t immediately ‘translatable into assessment’. This is not intended to be a solution to how cities are studied in urban planning but to introduce new ways of describing the city that could be used in addition with maps and other standard ways. He highlights the methodology as being important. “This methodology is not directed at the world of facts and particular forms of cultural objects being investigated. It is not a toolkit that can be pulled off the shelf and put to work.”

He does not direct his attention at the forms of cultural objects, so he is not looking at buildings of the city. Instead he reads various texts and looks at how “to reflect and refract the cultural material out of which they are made”. He looks at novels, postcards, and films to describe the various types of people and sub-cultures that inhabit the city. Highmore uses works from artists and writers to develop a view of the city as if he is seeing it from the point of view of what the writers and artists are seeing. From this I began thinking that instead of looking at a built form I would investigate a film or novel to develop an understanding of how people experience material and place. Ben Highmore’s book looks at describing the city. “In stressing the urban imaginary, I have been claiming that rhythmanalysis needs to attend to the living, material fantasy of urban life, which finds some of its most condensed articulations in films, novels and urban forms.”

This was of interest in relation to my thesis research into the phenomenological experience of building materials. I was looking for a method or tool to describe the embodied meaning in materials.
After reading Highmore’s book I was interested in how artists observe and objectify local identity. I was interested in the book “Thinking Long” by Liam Kelly for the ways artists use mapping or observing a place and considering how to translate this experience and feel of a place into an architecture. The work of artists such as Willie Doherty describe the city in relation to the social meaning embedded in the built fabric of Belfast, as ‘urban ownership’ has been contested due to the political situation. The divisions have often been made deliberately visible by the people, for example by murals on walls, and also by buildings that become symbolic objects. The technique of a combination of photographic image with text is an effective way of describing the city. It’s not like a zoning map that would be used in urban planning where a colour would be used to describe an area in terms of its urban function.

The works of Willie Doherty inspired me to overlay text on my photographs of the handball alleys to try and reference how materials are experienced. The text I used was from the Seamus Heaney poem “Sunlight”. I choose this particular poem because I was interested in how sunlight plays with texture in my first study model (fig.3) and also he is an Irish poet who has a strong connection with the culture of Ireland. I wanted to discribe the material in a different way to a generic OS map. I was trying to map the places in a new way that reflects the character of the place in how the materials are experienced.

By using this method of photograph and text overlay I began to look at traditional maps in a new way. I began to think of traditional maps as photographs of areas of land with meanings: names, places and history overlaid in text.

Artists’ works often documents a view of how they experience a town or city as they see it at the current time. They are living through it and documenting their experience.

In the introduction paragraph to the book “Architecture Regionalism collected writings on place, identity, modernity, and tradition” Canizaro argues that “Love of one’s locality, pride in its accomplishments, and loyalty to everything in it brings about a state of mind known as regionalism. In turn, regionalism elicits the common interests of a community and fires its members with the energy to realize those interests.”

In this book I was also interested in the description of Gaudi’s architecture

“He acknowledges the building traditions of his region - its Moorish ancestry, its strong influences of Gothic and Baroque building. He revels in the long standing crafts of his place - particularly the rich and capable ceramic, stone cutting, and ironwork trades. But he also reaches deeper than building and craft precedents of Catalonia, drawing on the primal qualities of the region - its landscape, its vegetation, its connection to the sea. The Casa Mila is expressive of Moorish, Gothic and Baroque traditions, but it also incarnates the waves, the rocks, and even the seaweed of the Mediterranean coast.”

“Through the architecture one can feel the exuberance and passion of the culture”

In this chapter I have described my research into materials. I elaborated on my research into the physical properties of materials such as texture, colour and how light interacts with a material and also on the phenomenological aspect of how materials are experienced. In the chapter one I described my interest in everyday people of the city who are viewed as the theatre of everyday life and also my first hand experience of three music concerts. In the next sections I will describe my precedent study drawings of the Katsura imperial villa followed by my handball alley research and my thesis site description.

Notes:
12. Liam Kelly, Thinking Long (Dublin: Gandon Editions, 1996), 73
KA TSURA IMPERIAL VILLA

I selected the Katsura imperial villa as a precedent study in connection with my thesis research. The importance of my drawings looking at Katsura are an interest in the use of materials and the relationship between the old and the new in the various additions to the villa. The cultural character is maintained in each addition and the same proportional system of the tatami mat is used. I am also interested in the relationship between inside and outside and how views are constructed with the route of the paths with the positioning of partitions and landscaping.
The old game of handball in Ireland was played in a court size of sixty foot by thirty foot. This size of alley was known as the “big alley”. There are about 700 handball alleys in Ireland: public alleys located in towns, on the side of roads in the countryside and more private alleys in barracks, schools and Garda stations. A few of these alleys are still in use but a lot of them are in disrepair and are in danger of being demolished. The handball alleys that are found in many Irish villages reflect how sport and competition was and still is a major part of Irish village culture. In the past the social function of outdoor handball alleys played an important part in local culture, from connecting neighbours in a village to forming a connection between multiple villages and also connecting counties through inter county events. Áine Ryan says “The handball alley was a significant venue in the cultural and political life of the surrounding community.”16 They were used as a social public space with a theatrical element to it - some still are used today. Public theatrical space with a relationship between performer and spectator was a reason for choosing handball alleys to research. McElligot describes how “the setting, too, was simple, with little to distract the eye from ‘the stage’. A sloping hillside where spectators sat, a clay or flagged floor, a front wall with or without side walls or wingwalls as they were sometimes called.”17

In regard to culture handball alleys are a typology that are unique to Ireland. The reason the culture died out was because of the introduction of a new rubber ball around the 1970s. The old game was about stamina and skill, the new game was about speed.

“In the early days, the occasion of a match was a significant local event with matchmakers among the spectators. The alley was often the venue for parish dances and gatherings”.18

The construction and materiality of them as an object was also of interest to me as an investigation into architectural tradition. They have a undecorated sculptural form and were constructed using an honest construction. The construction of the ‘big alleys’ would not be considered a vernacular architecture as it did not evolve through generations of passed down knowledge. The builders used material that was available at the time in a type of DIY construction. They are constructed without the design input of architects and built out of a particular need of the people at the time. They were often designed by the top players at the time.

My interest is in public space so from the 700 alleys I selected fifty (see images pages 24 to 27) that have a connection to public space and were located in rural towns or in the countryside. I then selected five as a research sample from Co. Mayo because they are in the same county. Each has a particular relationship to the road and also a spectator viewing area considered in the design.

Notes:
16. ibid
19. ibid
20. ibid

“The handball alley has an inherent architectural, sculptural and aesthetic beauty, possessing a striking form unarticulated or adorned in any decorative sense.” 15

Áine Ryan
Of the five I selected two were in towns, two outside the town and one in the countryside near some farms and they were built between 1920 and 1970. The alleys “paralleled the evolution of construction techniques in Ireland. They were usually built by voluntary local labour”.  

I was interested in the physical construction, the positioning and orientation in relation to the village and the relationship with nature and the surrounds. I gathered maps from the OSI and visited the five alleys, photographed and explored them with axonometric and section perspective drawings. The results of this are on pages 28 to 30.
Tulsk, Co. Roscommon
This alley was demolished in the 1990s. An Interpretive Centre now occupies the site of this former alley.

Fullerstown, Wind’s Walk, Co. Wexford
Photographed by A. Ryan, August 2000
Information from HERITAGE WEEK postcard:
Main wall of alley built in 1912, with side and back walls added in 1930. Alley restored in 1990. Site of alley donated by Boyee Estate. Walls constructed from block and sand cement. Floor from cement. Height of main wall: 21 ft
Length of main wall: 34 ft
Length of side wall: 24 ft
Width at back of alley: 15 ft
Alley was also used for dancing and BBQs. Free access for racket ball, football and hurling practice. 70 years ago up to 40 people played every evening in the alley.

Banada, Co. Sligo
Built 1900. The person involved was named Thomas Walsh. Resided in Banada at that time, but originated from Powelbourough outside Tubbercurry. Walls extended to side walls in 1927. Back Wall was built in 1970.

The Commons, Ballingarry, Co. Tipperary
Photographs and information provided by M. Maher.
The village of The Commons in Slieveardagh is rather famous on a number of fronts as it already hosts:
· the National Flag Monument erected in 1989 and formally unveiled by the Catholic Primate of All-Ireland, the late Cardinal Tomas O Fiach. It was erected in a tribute to its origins in 1848 where the Tricolour was first flown on the night before the United Irishmen rebellion at the nearby Famine Warhouse.
· a monument to the World Record holding middle-distance runner John Joe Barry (better known as Ballincurry hare) who was born nearby.
· the location of the said Famine Warhouse exactly which is now a National Monument under the Office of Public Works. This was seen as the source of the abortive United Irishmen insurrection of 1848, a plaque commemorating the life of local hero but nationally famous traditional musician Larry Wall Fitzpatrick.
The Ball Alley itself was built in about 1960 on lands donated by a William Brennan and replaced an earlier facility further up the village. It hosted Senior Handball All-Ireland Finals at that time involving the Delaney brothers of Kilkenny, Joey Maher of Co. Louth and Tipperary’s own Thomas Doheny. It was also extensively used as an outdoor and open dancing platform up until the late 1980’s. Sadly, it has lain in disrepair ever since for many years.

Following text and photograph view from road from http://www.buildingsoofireland.ie/niah/search.jsp?type=record&county=SL&regno=32315009
1890 - 1910
Detached stone handball alley, built c. 1900. Uncoursed rubble limestone walling, interior faces smooth-rendered. Concrete floor. Concrete changing facility and viewing platform added to east end c. 1930.
This is a well-built example of a traditional handball alley with substantial rubble stone walling. Once a dominant feature in the Irish countryside, good examples are becoming increasingly rare.
Pomeroy has a proud tradition of handball and has produced many fine exponents of the game down the years. Handball was played in the Market Yard adjacent to The Diamond from the 1880’s, and the present 60x30 alley began life in the late 1920’s when a plot of land on the Fairhill was acquired from the local landlord, Col. Lowry, and an open alley built there. Among the main drivers of the project were Sylvie Lynagh, Jimmy Quinn, Dan McNally and Fr. Brady.

Handball is now played in Pomeroy in the 40x20 court at the local football/handball complex.

**Images and information provided by P. O’Brien, September 2010**

**Handball**

- **Mobane, Crossmaglen, Co. Armagh**
  - This alley, located near Crossmaglen, was built in 1926 and is still in use.
  - Photographed by J. Lyons, January 2010

- **Cregganhill, Crossmaglen, Co. Armagh**
  - This alley was built as a double alley in 1928 and extended in 1930. It is still in use.
  - Photographed by J. Lyons, January 2010

- **Hacketstown, Co. Carlow**
  - Photographed by P. Garrison and N. O’Brien, October 2010

- **Big Mean, Co. Carlow**
  - Photographed by E. Timoney, August 2010

- **Tinryland, Co. Carlow**
  - Photographed August 2008, by S. Ryan

- **Barrack Hill, Cavan Town, Co. Cavan**
  - Photographed by P. Fitzpatrick, August 2009

- **Lacken, Co. Cavan**
  - Built 1923.
  - Photographs from P. Fitzpatrick & J. Brady

- **Tullyvin, Co. Cavan**
  - Photographs taken by E. Timoney, Feb 2009 and P. Fitzpatrick, Aug 2009

**Images and information provided by P.O’Brien, September 2010**
Carnagnoe, Caher Mountain, Ogonelloe, Co. Clare. Photograph and following text taken from article with permission from author, Michael McNamara. Some things never change. “The young lads would race home from mass on Sunday so they could get in a few games before the big lads came.” This tale was related to John Cooney by Michael Minogue of Carnagnoe about the alley in that part of the parish almost 30 years later in the 50s. Things hadn’t changed, we had to do the same thing in order to get our game. The alleys in Carnagnoe came about when the bog road was built in the 1860s. In one place the road had to be built over a deep dried up river bed. It was approximately 28’ wide and 15’ deep. The locals, realising the potential of the site as an alley painted the walls and levelled the floor. This alley was in use until the early part of this century, when the Gleeson family who arrived to the parish in 1903 gave the site of the present alley to the people of the parish.

Ogonelloe, Co. Clare. Photographed Nov 2008

The following text is from an article written by Michael McNamara about the handball alleys in the parish of Ogonelloe. See Cornagnoe entry also. The site of this alley was given to the people of the parish by the Gleeson family who arrived to Ogonelloe in 1903. There were two short side walls and the original floor was clay. Then in the 30s about 40’ of a concrete floor was laid down. Outside of hurling, handball was the most popular game being played in the parish. In 1953 the present side walls were built and plastered and a concrete floor extended to 60’. It also became the parish dance hall each Sunday evening during the late 50s and early 60s. Lack of transport in the early years confined handball to a parish sport and it wasn’t until 1957 that a club was registered. That year J.O’Brien, J. Sheehy, Flan O’Farrell and Michael Dinan took part in the Clare championships. Interest in handball remained high until the late 60s when it died away to the just the old game.

Tuamgraney, Co.Clare. Photographed 1990

This was the home alley of Pat Kirby and his brothers. Pat played some of his handball here and the rest in America. Over the years Pat won many titles including world titles and was recognised as one of best handballers ever.

Castleterry, Ballindangan, Co. Cork

Handball alley against side of bridge. Slipway to river, and used for landscaping done in late 90s by local Tidy Towns group. Possibly that alley floor was at recessed level prior to this. Water level high at time of visit and floor of alley partly flooded.

Drumnsna, Co.Leitrim

Handball alley against side of bridge. Slipway to river, and used for landscaping done in late 90s by local Tidy Towns group. Possibly that alley floor was at recessed level prior to this. Water level high at time of visit and floor of alley partly flooded.

Kilclare, Co. Leitrim. Photographed August 2008

This alley is said to have been shortened to make way for a new road.

Kilcormac, Co.Offaly

This alley is said to have been shortened to make way for a new road.

Shrule, Co. Mayo

Possibly this set of alleys was originally 2x 3 Wall alleys back to back. One of these has been knocked and another built to narrow the court, and a third alley built at the back to create a renewed 4 wall alley.


Bellahoeven, Co. Mayo

Photograph and following information from http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/ed/record.jsp?type=record&county=NC&regno=20901919

1920 - 1940

Freestanding reinforced concrete handball alley, erected c. 1930, with rendered five-tiered stand to west side approached by two rendered steps. Angled cast-iron H-bars support underside of stand, supporting on concrete piers. Square-headed door opening to west end of south side. Rendered floor to ball court.

This handball alley is an important reminder of the strong position the sport once held in Ireland, illustrating the high regard and esteem traditional sports were given in the early days of the Republic. The building contained early examples of concrete and is made distinct from other handball alleys by the incorporation of spectator seats.
mere boys surrounded by a casual posse of Raleighs, How safe we were back then, an unanswerable butt greeted by a knowing wink. and savage laughter at a misjudged bounce, applauding quietly the clever use of angle and wall.

Hard earned appreciation of oldened players, ordinary men, even the occasional cornerboy, Great parochial tournaments mythologising of Sweet Afton and Woodbine. from behind a knowledge cloud watched by older heroes in peaked caps in billowing white shirts and best suit trousers, the Sunday handballers were dancelords ideal companions for comely, crossroads maidens during the summers; Cyril Curran and his Assaroe Ceili Band usually provided the music, this the Handball alley was also a popular venue for Open Air Ceilis on the odd Sunday evenings repaired immediately. time blew a hole in the Alley in 1957, regardless of this person’s treachery the damage was a pleasure to sit and watch a good game of handball. Someone who was known to all at that younger lads used the side alley, during the summer’s the alley would be packed, it was always Fergal Gildea, Dennis Lawn. With the help of Francie Gallagher, those listed above are the Alo Hoey, Willie and John Mc Allister, Brendan Farrelly, Sean Mc Dermott, Roger and James Gallagher, Paddy and Kevin Begley, P.J. Coughlin, Paddy Donagher, Blackie Coyle, Paddy and Paddy and Cormac Mc Cready, Thomas Duffy, Jimmy Rooney, Jimmy Coyle, Michael Donagher, Sylvester Maguire Snr., Johnnie Moore, Willie Daly, Dermott Lapsley, Tom, Packie and Francie.

The Handball Alley was one of the busiest sports arenas in the town, some of the people who following text from http://www.geocities.com/johngall_99/ballyshannon4050_1.html


H-plan handball alley, built c.1920, now disused, with two courts. Rendered walls. Front piece with various double gates in site. Handball alleys from an important part of the social history of Ireland. A very popular sport throughout the twentieth century, handball rapidly declined in popularity in the latter half of the twentieth century. As a result, handball alleys are now often abandoned and are often threatened by demolition.

Remains of limestone boundary walls in former barracks, c.1865, with remains of handball alley to site. Building to site in use. Completes conspicuous random-stone limestone walls with outcast limestone piers, having central angular projections to west, south and east elevations with parapet. Blocked entrance and clear opening to west elevation flanked by dressed stone piers, and with parapet limestone return to north parapet, also flanked by piers. Single storey building to north-east corner possibly incorporates limestone from earlier buildings. Full alley to north-west, comprising three-sided alley with rounded back wall and creased exhibit limestone coping side walls, and may be part of original limestone buildings.

This former military barracks was described by Lewis as being “a large range of buildings adapted for three officers and seventy-two non-commissioned officers and privates,” the buildings were built in 1767 and demolished in 1859. The present walls are substantially intact, and with their bays and other features, are an important reminder of the town’s military heritage.
Height of day pour in Handball alley in Shrule

External Finish

Internal Finish

Notes:
24. Maps on pages 26–28 are from print screen of OSI website accessed 12 April 2011 http://maps.osi.ie/publicviewer/#V1.591271.743300.0.10

Shrule
Population 1996 = 482

Ballyheane

Swinford
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<th>15-17</th>
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Note: The table contains data for various years, hospitals, and different categories such as age groups and health standards. The information is not clearly visible due to the resolution of the image.
The location of the site for my project is in the town of Foxford because the layout of the town has a strong relationship with theatrical space. The roads form a cross roads. There are three churches, one on each of the other roads. The handball alley is on the road to Ballina which is one of the main towns in County Mayo. The alley is currently overgrown and it is in a state of disrepair. A wall is breaking the visual connection to the road and removing the spectator aspect.

The scale of my proposal is in relation to the current population of the town. Statistical data relating to the surrounding population was researched to determine this.

My proposal is for a public theatre to be incorporated into the handball alley and also a hostel for poetry and playwrights. Also as part of my proposal is for a public bike link to the train station that is one kilometre outside the town.
My thesis project uses local materials to renew the old handball alley in Foxford Co. Mayo as a theatre and new hostel tower for poets and playwrights. The existing alley is in a state of disrepair and unused. By giving the old handball alley a new life the local social and cultural practices will also be renewed.

The theatre is positioned in the old alley by hanging new seating into it. The hostel tower is at the edge of the river and the storage/workshop area is at the back of the site.

The dots on the map of Ireland represent all the old handball alleys and shows the location of the site.

The train line from Balina to Castlebar is shown on the second map with Foxford in the middle. Foxford train station is 1km outside the town and I propose a public bike route from the station back to the site. This is overlaid on the Moy river system to show the relationship between the natural and man made topography. The Greek word “Polis” means city-state and includes the surrounding network of towns and villages in the description of city.

F. r. Higgins was a landscape poet from Foxford. His poems were inspired by the local landscape and people. He went on to be director of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. This was a reason for proposing a poetry hostel as there is a connection to poetry in the town.

The sites position in relation to the urban layout of the town has a strong connection with theatrical space. As you can see in the town plan drawing, the roads form a crossroads and there are 3 Churches one on each road and the site is on the 4th road. By renewing the handball alley the urban layout of 4 theatrical spaces is reestablished.

Photographs of materials and textures in the town are considering the experience of building materials and there sensory properties (phenomenology).

The two images one from behind the stage and the other from the street looking at a performance show how the old walls contrast with the new in texture and colour. The new finish is a pitch-pine rotary cut veneer plywood that is a red colour to contrast with the old blue render.

This contrast can also be seen in the section perspective which also shows the structure. The structural idea relates to the idea of spectator and performer with the weight of the stage supporting the seating. The wood model is a structural study, it shows the main glulam beam, three cranked glulam beams, fixed base columns with pin connections at the top. Learning from the wood model I further developed the structure in the 1:50 model by inverting the columns. A modern construction method reflects the current time but in a form that suggests a unity with the past.

The new wall/building meets the ground with a community seat facing the river. The seat is made of cast in situ concrete using local sandstone as aggregate. A paved public area is in front of the seat and the same hexagonal paving that is found at corners of footpaths in the town is used as the material for this public space. Rain water is collected on the paved area for use in flushing the toilets.

This project is a catalyst for cultural change and how architects deal with cultural change is the greatest environmental problem for architects today.
O You Among Women
by F.R. Higgins

When pails empty the last brightness
Of the well, at twilight-time,
and you are there among women --
O mouth of silence,
Will you come with me, when I sign,
to the far green wood, that fences
A lake inlaid with light?

To be there, O, lost in each other,
While day melts in airy water,
And the drake-headed pike -- a shade
In the Waves’ pale stir!
For love is there, under the breath,
As a coy star is there in the quiet
Of the wood’s blue eye.

Notes:
1. Entrance
2. Reception
3. Dressing room
4. Stage
5. Green room
6. Store
7. Workshop
8. Cafe
9. Seating
10. Public WC
11. Lift
12. Poetry hostel
13. Meeting room
14. Writing room
15. Reading room
16. Staff area/ticket sales
17. Public bike stands
18. Water collection tank
19. River access
20. Rainwater harvesting
21. Public bike area
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