

CURRAGHS ANCIENT AND MODERN

By Wallace Clark.

Boats and sailing are mentioned more than thirty times in Adamnan's seventh century 'Life of Saint Columba.' There is ample internal evidence to show that the writer was familiar with sea voyaging and he made it clear that in St. Columba's time passages between Iona and Ireland were made both in wooden boats and skin covered curraghs. Curraghs were evidently more common but no details have survived of the boat used on the original voyage from Derry, apart from the fact that she carried thirteen men.

For the 1963 centenary we decided to build a curragh rather than a planked boat for a number of reasons. The canvas covered curraghs now in use in the west of Ireland are direct descendants of the leather covered craft of the sixth century. In fact similar craft were observed by Julius Caesar when he invaded Britain in B.C. 54 — they were unlike anything he had met on the Continent, and the description included in his commentaries is accurate of a present day curragh.

Perhaps it should be made clear that the word 'coracle' implies a smaller type of river boat, said to be of quite different origin and designed to carry one or two men only in calm water ; there are a very few still surviving on Welsh rivers. The seagoing Irish curragh can claim a unique system of construction and design almost unchanged for over two