



ARCHAEOLOGY



First Year Programme 2025-26

Why choose Archaeology?

- Demand for skilled archaeology graduates has never been greater.
 - Ireland's National Development Plan calls for continued expansion of housing, transport, and green energy for the foreseeable future - these projects will all incorporate archaeological assessments and excavations.
- Archaeology is a synthesis of the humanities and the sciences – it provides unique insights into the long-term story of ourselves and our interactions with the world around us.
- Excellent training in critical analysis, interpretation, and effective communication.
- Studying Archaeology positions graduates ideally for a wide range of career paths managing sustainability in the face of development and environmental impacts.
- You can take the full range of Archaeology classes as part of the BA Joint Honours (GY101) or BA Global Experience (GY129), or you can take just some Archaeology classes as a part of various courses such as BA Film & Digital Media (GY127), BA Children Studies (GY110), BA History (GY105), BSc in Psychology (GY104), etc.

Please note – this document may be subject to change.

1st Year Archaeology Handbook 2025-2026

Semester 1 Co-ordinator: Dr. Carleton Jones
Semester 2 Co-ordinator: Dr. Michelle Comber

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Welcome to Archaeology

The Department of Archaeology is situated in the Arts/Science Building overlooking the River Corrib on the north side of the main campus. Members of staff have a wide variety of research interests and expertise in different aspects of Irish and European Archaeology. We are ready to help you out and glad to meet you, so contact us with any questions you may have.

- Our Head of Discipline is Dr. Michelle Comber michelle.comber@universityofgalway.ie
- Check out our courses and news updates at: www.universityofgalway.ie/archaeology.

The Archaeology Department Library (Room ARC202) is available as a study space for students enrolled on any Archaeology course. It is typically open during normal daytime hours when staff are present in the Department. If it is locked, you can get the key from the Department administrator Fiona McInerney. However, the room is sometimes used for meetings or other purposes, so check for notices on the door.

What is Archaeology?

Archaeology is the study of past peoples and how they lived through the examination of the physical remains that they have left behind. We also work with historical documents, oral history, community knowledge and other information. Archaeology has a very broad range, from our earliest human origins to the present day. Archaeology reveals the variety, richness and achievements of human culture, and informs modern-day values and debates on issues such as how to manage sustainability in the face of increasing development and environmental impacts.

At the University of Galway we introduce you to the full breadth of our discipline in your first year, looking at the prehistoric and historical archaeology of Ireland in its international context, from the Stone Age to the 20th century. We also teach you how to handle and analyse artefacts, and how to recognise and understand the wide variety of archaeological sites and monuments that are found in Ireland.

As a synthesis of the sciences and the humanities, Archaeology is one of the great frontiers of knowledge creation today. We show you how an archaeologist finds sites, excavates them, and then interprets what they've discovered. Further themes are developed in 2nd and 3rd years where staff discuss their own work in more detail in Ireland, Europe, the Middle East, the Americas and more.

What some First Year students from the last two years said:

I took a subject out of my comfort zone and learned so much . . .

The course has improved my understanding hugely, so interesting, almost wish it went on for longer . . .

I found the course very interesting and I particularly enjoyed the field trips and the workshops. The instructors made the course enjoyable.

The course is captivating and very interesting, very enjoyable.

I went from knowing nothing to learning a lot, great course, loved that it's hands on and interactive.

Contacts

Our administrator, Fiona McInerney, may be contacted at fiona.mcinerney@universityofgalway.ie or on (091) 49 2167. Her office hours are from 9am to 1pm (Room ARC217). For more specifically academic queries, contact Dr. Carleton Jones carleton.jones@universityofgalway.ie in Semester 1, and Dr. Michelle Comber michelle.comber@universityofgalway.ie in Semester 2.

Courses, Class Times & Venues

On-campus lectures begin on **Sept. 15**.

There are **four** archaeology courses in First Year, and each is worth 5 ECTS.

Semester One

- AR113 Prehistoric Ireland and Europe
- AR1104 Material Culture and Museums

AR113 & AR1104 run in sequence. AR113 starts on 15th Sept and when that finishes, AR1104 starts on 3rd Nov. Times and venues are the same for both courses. If you are a Visiting Student or if you are on a BA programme where you only take some Archaeology courses, you do not need to take both.

Day	Time	Venue
Mondays	12 – 2	Room B001 Human Biology Building
Tuesdays	10 – 11	O h-Eocha
Wednesdays	10 – 11	D'Arcy Thompson

Shortly after the start of the semester, on **Saturday 27th September**, there will be a **field class** to the Burren, Co. Clare (details will be announced in class closer to the time).

In the week of 27th October, after AR113 finishes and just before AR1104 begins, you will be required to attend a tutorial on referencing (your specific tutorial time will be assigned closer to the time).

On **Tuesday 25th November** there will be a **field class** to a museum.

Semester Two

- AR1105 Medieval Ireland and Europe
- AR1106 Sites and Monuments in the Landscape

AR1105 & AR1106 run in sequence. AR1105 starts on Jan. 12 and when that finishes, AR1106 starts on March 4. Times and venues are the same for both courses. If you are a Visiting Student or if you are on a BA programme where you only take some Archaeology courses, you do not need to take both.

Day	Time	Venue
Mondays	12-2	AC213 (Arts & Science, Geography)
Wednesdays	10-11	CSB 1005, 1 st Floor (Computer Science Bldg)
Thursdays	10-11	G002 Áras Uí Chathail

On **Saturday February 28** there will be a **field class** (AR1105) to the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin. On **Saturday April 4** there will be a **field class** (AR1106) to the royal site of Rathcroghan.

Field Classes

It will be necessary to dress appropriately and be fully prepared for all weather conditions on the various planned field classes. Over the years we have experienced everything from blistering sunshine to driving blizzards, so prepare for the worst and hope for the best! For field classes in poor weather, please ensure to bring a few layers of warm clothing, a full set of waterproofs, a hat, gloves and boots.

AR113 Prehistoric Ireland and Europe

Module Co-ordinator: Maggie Ronayne

Lectures Commence: 15th September 2025

Lectures End: 22nd October 2025

Module Summary

This course is an introduction to the prehistoric communities who inhabited Ireland, Europe and Western Asia from about 150,000 BC to AD 400. Archaeologists divide this long period of time into the Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age), Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age), Neolithic (New Stone Age), Bronze Age and Iron Age. We begin with the earliest modern human inhabitants of Europe and Western Asia, their hunter-gatherer way of life, their art and their relationship to the Neanderthal communities who preceded them. We look at evidence for the first hunter-gatherers who settled in Ireland and later the settlements and rituals of the first communities to develop agriculture and build megalithic tombs. We move on to examine changes in how these communities organised themselves and their rituals over thousands of years, including their adoption of bronze and iron metalworking.



Croaghbeg court tomb, Co. Donegal

Module Weighting: 5 ECTS

Assessment:

Continuous assessment consisting of an in-class test (50% of overall mark) and an essay assignment (50% of overall mark).

Learning Outcomes:

This course enables students to:

- Describe in detail the range of evidence for the development of prehistoric communities and societies in Ireland

- Place evidence for the development of prehistoric societies in Ireland in a wider context with particular reference to Europe and Western Asia
- Recognise all of the major artefact and site types from the relevant time period in Ireland and selected key artefacts and site types from the same period in Europe & Western Asia
- Discuss and compare interpretations by archaeologists of this evidence
- Demonstrate critical understanding of the nature of prehistoric evidence, its chronology and classification including awareness of problems in the use of classification tools
- Assemble and comment on evidence for key issues and questions in the study of prehistory

Readings:

Key Textbook: Waddell, J. 2022 [2010]. *The Prehistoric Archaeology of Ireland*. Wordwell: Dublin.

Further readings and related online resources will be provided in class and on Canvas.

AR1104 Material Culture and Museums

Module Co-ordinators: Maggie Ronayne & Conor Newman

Lectures Commence: 3rd November 2025

Lectures End: 26th November 2025

Field Class: In this course we will visit a museum on Tuesday 25th November and the essay assignment is linked to this class.

Module Summary

This course looks at the material world (from everyday objects to buildings), the things that people made in the past, how they used them to contextualise and enrich social activities, and the museums that nowadays put these objects on public display.

In this course you will learn how to handle and analyse artefacts, and how to recognise, date and record them the way professionals do. You will also learn how to 'read' an object from the point of view of how it functioned, practically and socially. Even the most mundane objects tell us something about the people who owned and used them; the fact that we have institutions for the display of ancient objects tells us something about ourselves and our attitudes toward and sense of propriety over the past.



Most people only ever get to see artefacts behind glass display cases in museums. After having handled and really becoming familiar with artefacts, we will be better placed to assess how well museums work in communicating the stories of objects. Other issues that will be discussed include ethical considerations around the display of human remains.

Module Weighting: 5 ECTS

Assessment:

Continuous assessment consisting of an in-class test (50% of overall mark) and an essay assignment (50% of overall mark).

Learning Outcomes:

- How to handle, examine and record archaeological artefacts
- How to classify and date archaeological artefacts
- How to think critically and imaginatively about museums and exhibition planning
- Understand how material culture performs in societies, past and present

Module Delivery Method:

On-campus lectures, prescribed reading and writing exercises, 2 artefact labs and a field class to a museum.

AR1105 Medieval Ireland and Europe

Module Co-ordinator: Dr. Michelle Comber

Lectures Commence: Mon Jan 12, 2026

Lectures End: Mon February 23rd, 2026

Field Class: Saturday Feb. 28th, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin

Structure of Module:

The module consists of in-person lectures and a visit to the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin.

Module Summary

The course explores early historic and medieval Ireland in its European context. Topics include: an examination of Roman influences, the archaeology of the Christian church; the Golden Age of Irish art; the Vikings in Scandinavia, the North Atlantic, and Ireland; the impact of the Norse on Ireland; the transforming influence of the Anglo-Normans.



Module Weighting: 5 ECTS

Assessment:

Continuous assessment including in-class test.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of the course, a student should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the archaeology of late prehistoric and early/medieval Ireland
- Display critical awareness of interpretations of late prehistoric and early/medieval Ireland
- Understand how Irish culture was shaped by, and contributed to, European cultural horizons from saints Brigid and Patrick to the Anglo-Normans.

Core Texts

Edwards, N. 1990. *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland*. London.

Fitzhugh, W. W. 2000. *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*. Washington.

O'Connor, K.D. 1998. *The Archaeology of Medieval Rural Settlement in Ireland*. Dublin.

Johnson, R. 2004. *Viking Age Dublin*. Dublin.

Larsen, A.C. 2001. *The Vikings in Ireland*. Roskilde.

Sheehan, J. and Ó Corráin, D. (eds) 2010. *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West*. Dublin.

Further readings and related online resources will be provided in class and on Canvas.

AR1106 Sites and Monuments in the Landscape

Module Co-ordinator: Conor Newman

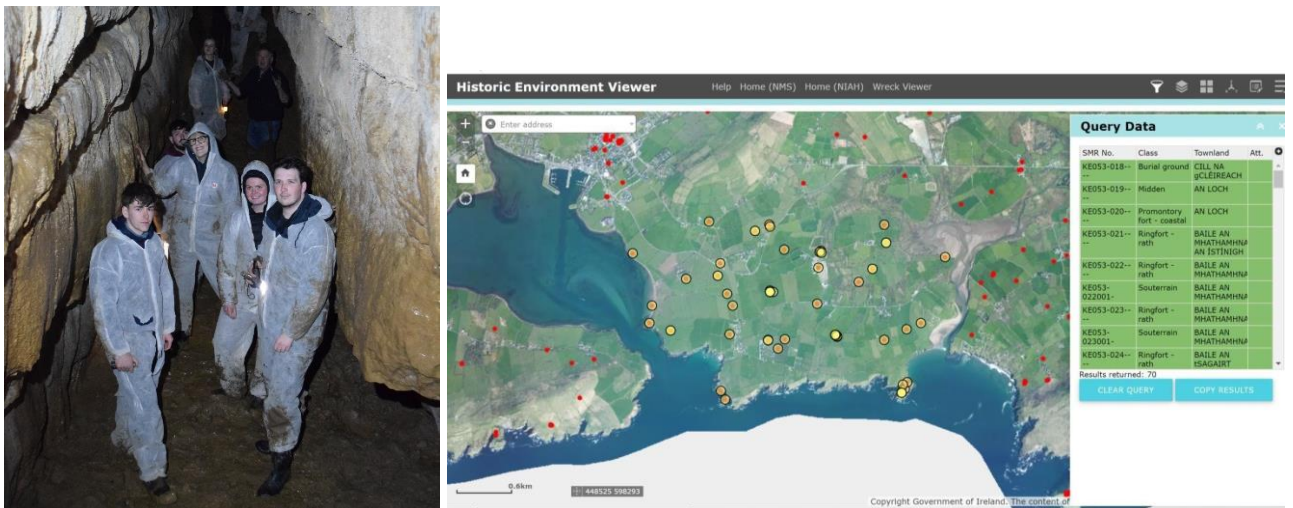
Lectures Commence: Wednesday, 25th February, 2026

Lectures End: Monday 23rd March 2026; followed by a field class on Sat April 4.

Field class: The Sat April 4 field class in this course is to the royal complex of Rathcroghan.

Module Summary

Burial mounds, megalithic tombs, enigmatic earthworks, ringforts, ancient churches, medieval castles, and shipwrecks – these are just some of the vast array of archaeological monuments in the Irish landscape. This course teaches you how to recognize and date these various sites and monuments, how to access and use various online resources that contain detailed map-based information about all known Irish archaeological sites, and finally, how archaeologists progress from this abundance of ‘raw’ data to interpreting and presenting archaeological monuments and landscapes to the public.



Students exploring Oweynagat cave at the ancient royal site of Rathcroghan (left), and sites & monuments recorded near Dingle, Co. Kerry (right).

This course is divided into three parts:

1) Irish sites & monuments in the field

These lectures will teach you to recognize different types of Irish archaeological sites that range from the temporary campsites of the very first hunter-gatherers that inhabited the island all the way up to medieval castles.

2) Online resources for Irish archaeology in the landscape

A series of workshops that teach you how to discover detailed information about Irish archaeological sites in their landscape settings from a variety of online map-based databases. Students will use the online Sites & Monuments Record, the Wreck Viewer, the Megalithic Survey, Irish Excavations database, National Museum of Ireland finds database, etc.

3) From recording to presenting: Rathcroghan and Tara

This section teaches students how archaeologists progress from recording monuments in the field to presenting them to the public. Specific case studies are the monuments and landscapes that make up the ancient royal sites of Rathcroghan in Roscommon and the Hill of Tara in Meath.

Module Weighting: 5 ECTS**Assessment:**

Three-part continuous assessment (one assessment for each of the three sections above):

- 1) In-class test on Lectures 1 – 8: recognizing and dating Irish field monuments (50% of overall mark).
- 2) Using the online resources outlined in the second section of the course, students will complete an exercise that asks them to find and extract various pieces of specific information on particular sites (25% of overall mark).
- 3) Writing assignment on understanding how archaeologists progress from recording monuments in the field to presenting them to the public (25% of overall mark).

Learning Outcomes:

- How to recognise and date the main types of Irish field monuments.
- How to use the various online resources relating to Irish field monuments.
- Insights into how archaeological research contributes to communities and socio-economic initiatives.
- Understanding of the interface between archaeological conservation and farming practices.