

The Fid

The best vantage points for seeing Merville's historic Old Stone Pier are an approach from on the River Foyle itself and looking down towards the pier from a height on the village's shore green. The Old Pier is an emblem of Merville's rich maritime heritage: the Anchor Line ticket Office for the emigration boats was located just off the pier; and the pier itself is one of the last complete 1880's – 1890's Congested Districts Piers extant in Donegal.

This scene of Merville's historic Old Stone Pier, linking the River Foyle with the land of Inishowen, now features the striking addition of a new sculpture by artist Locky Morris, The Fid. This commission from Donegal County Council Public Art Office follows on from the artist's commission for Pole Star, his large sculpture which has become an iconic feature for Letterkenny.

The Fid at Merville Old Stone Pier has its inspirations within the village's powerful connections to the sea and seafaring. The artist's conversations with local people uncovered tales of the beacon fires, which were once lit on the hills of Inishowen to mark the passage down the River Foyle of emigration ships. And in Greencastle Maritime Museum the artist encountered an example of a 'fid', the small handheld tool turned from a piece of wood, used by fishermen for splicing ropes and nets and by sailmakers for opening holes in the sails without tearing the material. The final sculpture both recollects those beacon flames and that form of a 'fid'. It unites this elegant and flowing form with an assured sense of scale and location – standing over 25 feet high and over three feet wide at base, sited at the end of the pier, facing directly onto a beautiful and dramatic seascape.

The Old Pier then, marks the village's maritime heritage, for individual seafarers, emigrants and immigrants, their families, and the wider communities. In many ways, The Fid itself will act as a beacon towards this location: concentrating our vision and our thoughts upon those links between sea and land, which have made Merville.

The article above was commissioned for the book 'Across the Atlantic: Emigrating from Merville and Derry' which features a rich collection of articles and archive material. It is available from Donegal County Council Archives. For more information contact Public Art Office, Donegal County Council.