



LIVING AT DRUMCLAY:

A GLIMPSE OF LIFE ON A FERMANAGH CRANNOG

4 JUL - 10 OCT

ENNISKILLEN CASTLE



Fermanagh & Omagh
District Council
Comhairle Ceantair
Fhear Manach agus na hÓmaí



Department for
Communities

www.communities-ni.gov.uk

1. Wooden Vessel, 13th Century TOP SHELF

2. Turned Plate with Foot Ring (Yew), 13th–14th Century

Plates are relatively uncommon survivals and provide valuable evidence for dining practices within the settlement. This example was highly valued as it was repaired with wired stitching, fragments of which are on display here.

3. Hazelnut Shells

4. Wooden Knife, 9th Century

5. Knife Handle

6 - 7. Wooden Spoons

8. Wooden Spoon, 9th Century

Carved wooden spoons were among the most essential household objects at Drumclay. Used daily for eating and food preparation, they provide a direct connection to the routines of medieval life.

9. Wooden Spoon

10. Parts of a Wooden Cup, 9th–11th Century MIDDLE SHELF

11. Wooden Vessel

12. Goblet Base

13. Wooden Vessels

14. Wooden Stoppers

These small stoppers sealed vessels and containers – perhaps also leather flasks, helping to protect food and liquids from spoilage and contamination.

15. Wooden Lid, 13th-14th Century

The edge of the lid would have overhung the walls of a container and would have been where the lid was gripped to fit or remove it.

16. Wooden Keg, House 8023, 9th Century BOTTOM OF THE CASE

Kegs were used for storing and transporting liquids such as water, milk or ale.

17. Wooden Vessel

18 – 21. Ceramic Vessels

Pottery first appears at Drumclay between the late 10th and early 12th centuries. The distinctive handled form (object 20) is an example of Souterrain ware. From the 13th century onwards, Medieval Ulster Coarse Pottery became increasingly common.

22. Stave from a Churn

Part of a wooden churn used in butter-making. Churning converted milk or cream into butter.

23. Possible Churn Dasher or Food-Processing Implement

One of the most distinctive objects from Drumclay. Made from imported walnut, its function is uncertain, but it may have been used in butter-making as a churn dasher.

24. Scoop or Possible Butter Mould

It is not always possible to identify the function of the objects found at Drumclay. The shape of this object, carved from a single piece of alder, suggests it may have been used as a scoop for flour or grain. It could also be a butter mould, as its shape compares well with later examples.

25. Wooden Mallet

Were versatile tools used in everyday woodworking, construction and craft activities. Their broad striking surfaces allowed force to be applied without damaging the material being worked, making them especially useful for shaping timber, driving pegs and assembling wooden structures.

26. Dish 9th Century

Small wooden dish would have been used during the preparation, serving or storage of food within the household.

27. Cross-Shaped Object 9th Century

This small yew object was probably fashioned from a broken wooden stave that had originally formed part of a vessel. Reworked into a cross-shaped form, it is an example of how wood was reused and adapted rather than discarded. Its displayed here, beside the cross inscribed cheese press.

28. Spouts

Were used as fittings in wooden vessels, allowing liquids to be poured in a controlled way. One end was tapered for insertion into a vessel, while the other was cut diagonally to create a pouring opening.

29. Archer's Wrist Guard (Vambrace) 9th Century

Worn by an archer to protect the forearm from the bowstring, this rare leather wrist guard provides further evidence for hunting activities at the crannog.

30. Bow fragments (Yew)

Provide evidence for hunting. Wild game and birds likely supplemented the diet of the crannog's inhabitants.

31. Cheese Press 9th - 11th Century

This shallow wooden vessel was used in the final stage of cheese-making. Curds were placed inside and weighted down, allowing whey to drain through small holes in the base. It is likely that the carved cross, with expanded terminals in the centre of the dish may reflect Christian beliefs.

32. Leather Shoe, House 8023, 9th Century TOP SHELF

This exceptionally well-preserved leather shoe is made from a single piece of leather. It would have been secured with leather thongs wrapped around the foot.

33. Replica Shoe Made by John Nicholl (Reconstruction of Object 32.)

34. Leather Boot with Sole, Path 4467, 9th Century

The method of construction of this distinctive leather boot demonstrates considerable shoemaking skill. It belongs to a style first recognised at Drumclay, but also suggests familiarity with fashions and technologies circulating throughout Viking Age Europe.

35. Leather Sole, 13th–14th Century

36. Wooden Shoe Toggle, Path 4467, 9th Century

37-38. Shoe Last, House 8048, 9th Century & Shoe Last Fragment, 9th Century

A shoe last is a wooden form around which footwear was shaped and assembled.

39. Buckle Plate, 9th Century MIDDLE SHELF

This buckle once formed part of a fastening for a belt, strap or garment.

40. Pins and Needles

Pins and needles played an important role in dress and textile production. The antler crutch-headed pin fastened garments, while the wooden needles were used in sewing and repair.

41. Pins

These pins demonstrate the variety of fastening devices used by the inhabitants of Drumclay. Particularly notable is the finely made baluster-headed bone pin.

42. Latch or Stopper, 17th century

Although its purpose is uncertain, this object may have functioned as a fastening device or stopper. It reflects the continued use of Drumclay into the post-medieval period.

43. Pins and Brooch Pin

Used to secure clothing and cloaks, pins combined practical function with decorative display. The ringed pins and brooch pin from Drumclay reflect fashions found across Ireland and the Irish Sea region during the 9th–11th centuries.

44. Antler Combs

Combs were essential grooming tools but were also personal possessions. These combs belong to a long tradition of antler comb-making and reflect the importance of personal care and appearance.

45. Bird-Headed Comb

One of the most distinctive objects recovered from Drumclay, this antler comb is decorated with opposing bird or animal heads.

46. Double-Sided Composite Comb

Constructed from multiple pieces of antler joined with rivets, this comb demonstrates the sophistication of early medieval comb-making.

47-48. Beads, Bangles & Pendants

Made from lignite, jet and related materials, some of these examples were repaired, reused or remodelled during their lives, showing that they were valued possessions.

49. Glass & Amber Ornaments

These ornaments demonstrate access to materials obtained through trade networks extending beyond the local region. Amber is not native to Ireland and was imported, originating in the Baltic region.

50. Antler Spearhead or Pendant BOTTOM OF THE CASE

This unusual antler object may have functioned either as a small spearhead or as a suspended ornament.

51. Wooden Scraper, 9th Century

This may have been associated with leatherworking activities and used to scrape hides. Leather production was an important craft at Drumclay, as demonstrated by surviving shoes, sheaths and shoe lasts.

52. Leather Knife Sheaths

These sheaths protected knives. Their survival provides rare evidence for the ways in which tools were stored, carried and maintained in everyday life.

53. Leather Satchel

Leather satchels could be used to carry possessions, possibly a book or writing tablet, tools, or other valuables.

54. Linen Textile Fragment, 13th-14th Century

This finely woven linen textile survives with evidence of sewing, pleating and a finely stitched rolled hem and may once have formed part of a tailored linen garment. Its survival provides exceptional evidence for clothing and textile production in medieval Fermanagh.

55. Weaving Sword (Yew), 13th Century

Weaving swords were used to separate warp threads and to beat newly inserted weft threads firmly into place. This example belongs to a type found across Ireland and north-western Europe.

56. Weaving Tablets (Bone), 9th–11th Century

These three weaving tablets were made from animal bone and used in tablet weaving, a technique for producing narrow bands, belts and decorative trims. All the tablets show wear around the holes from prolonged use.

57. Flax Beaters, 9th Century

These beaters were used in the preparation of flax. The example on the right is made from alder and that on the left from fruitwood (Pomoideae).

58. Weaving Comb, 9th Century

This comb was used during weaving to pack threads together and produce an even, tightly woven fabric. Similar weaving combs are known from early medieval settlements throughout Ireland and Britain.

59. Spindles, 9th Century

Spindles were used for spinning fibres into thread. Rotated by hand, they twisted loose fibres into strong, continuous strands suitable for weaving.

60. Distaff (Yew), 11th Century, and Possible Distaff

A distaff held prepared fibres while they were being spun into thread. By keeping fibres organised and untangled, it enabled the spinner to draw out fibres smoothly and efficiently. The smaller of the two is an enigmatic object and possible distaff.

61. Bone Pin Beater, 9th Century

Pin beaters were specialised weaving tools used with vertical two-beam looms. The pointed end was used to separate or gather warp threads, while the broader rounded end helped press the weft into place.

62. Weft Beater, 9th Century

This finely shaped tool was used to guide & compact threads during weaving.

63. Possible Weft Bobbin, 9th Century

This small turned object is thought to be a weft bobbin. Bobbins were used to hold prepared thread, allowing it to be fed smoothly through the loom during weaving.

64. Possible Shuttle (Alder), House 8023, 9th Century

Shuttles carried the weft thread back and forth through the warp during weaving. This object comes from the same house as the objects displayed at Number 65.

65. Spinning and Weaving Tools, House 8023, 9th Century

This group illustrates several stages of textile production. Recovered from the same building (House 8023), these objects suggest that textile production formed part of everyday domestic activity within the settlement.

66. Gaming Board (Ash) 9th Century

This substantial gaming board is one of the most remarkable artefacts recovered from Drumclay. Made from ash and surviving in more than twenty-seven fragments, it originally measured at least 490 mm by 380 mm and was surrounded by a raised rim. The playing surface contains more than 194 peg holes arranged in a grid. Unusually large by Irish standards, the board may have accommodated more than one game or an especially elaborate version of a strategy game.

67. Gaming Pieces (Ash) 9th Century

These conical gaming pieces made from ash wood, were recovered from House 8035 and are likely to have formed part of the same gaming set.

68. Gaming Pieces (Ash) 9th Century

Found within House 8023, these gaming pieces represent the most common form at Drumclay: a simple conical peg-mounted counter.

69. Gaming Pieces (Ash) 9th Century

These pieces were recovered either directly with the gaming board or from deposits immediately beneath it. The pieces are charred – it's possible that the board and pieces were abandoned after they fell into the hearth at the centre of the house. The central piece shows where the peg attached to the base.

70. Gaming Counters

Unlike the earlier conical gaming pieces, these artefacts represent a variety of later medieval gaming counters and demonstrate the continuing popularity of board games at Drumclay. Left: Disc-shaped gaming piece made from alder. Centre: Distinctive pawn-shaped gaming piece made from yew, reflecting a more elaborate style than the earlier examples. Right: Possible gaming piece formed from a circular bark disc with a small central perforation.

Harp Tuning Pegs

These would have been used to tighten and tune the strings of instruments such as lyres and harps. They have a standard shape with either a split or a hole at one end to hold the string.

71. Tuning Peg Mid-9th to 11th Centuries

This copper alloy tuning peg belongs to a type known from several other Fermanagh crannogs and would have been used with a triangular harp, one of medieval Ireland's most celebrated instruments.

72. Wooden Tuning Pegs 9th Century

73. Copper Alloy Wire

Making copper alloy wire by repeated drawing of a metal rod or strip through progressively smaller holes in draw plates reflects specialised metalworking techniques. The wire could have been used for the strings of musical instruments, delicate craft work or as also seen at Drumclay for the repair of wooden items. C-shaped wire from House 8051 dating to 13th – 14th century. Wire coil from House 8024, 11th century.

74. Copper-alloy Binding

This small copper-alloy binding formed a reinforcing band around another object. While its original purpose is uncertain, bindings of this type could have been used as fittings on musical wind instruments. Similar bindings can be seen on the Rough Erne Horn seen on display at Enniskillen Castle in the upstairs Lakelands Gallery.

75. Unknown (9th Century)

The function of this finely carved and decorated yew item is unknown. It is broken along one edge suggesting that it was once attached to a larger object and it could have been a transverse headstock on a stringed instrument such as a lyre. Alternatively, it could have been a decorative handle on an item such as a tray or wooden platter.

76. Clapper balls (9th Century)

These curious little artefacts are made from small burrs of wood. The perforation through the extended neck suggests that they were meant to be suspended. It is possible that they could have been rattled against each other or against another surface. Alternatively, they could have been toys or used as floats.

Coopered Vessel Components, 9th–11th Century

This case includes staves, lids, discs, hoops and bungs from buckets, tubs, kegs and other stave-built containers essential for carrying water, storing liquids, preserving food and processing dairy products. The concentration of unfinished components suggests that cooperage—the specialised craft of making wooden vessels—was being carried out on the crannog itself.

Stave Roughout, 660–820

This unfinished stave represents an early stage in vessel manufacture and preserves evidence of the shaping process used by medieval coopers.

Unfinished Staves, 9th Century

These unfinished vessel staves demonstrate that wooden containers were being manufactured on site before receiving their final shaping and assembly.

Vessel Staves

These staves once formed the sides of buckets, tubs and kegs. Their survival allows the construction techniques of medieval coopers to be reconstructed in remarkable detail.

Lid with Handle

This carefully crafted lid demonstrates the sophistication of coopered vessels and the importance of protecting stored contents.

Vessel Discs

Wooden discs formed the bases or lids of coopered vessel and carved or turned vessels. These essential components allowed buckets, tubs and kegs to function effectively.

Composite Lid

One of the most complex cooperage components recovered from Drumclay, this object probably belonged to a vessel used for storing or dispensing liquids. Its construction demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of container design.

Wooden Bung

This bung sealed the opening of a vessel and prevented leakage. Although small, it was an essential component in protecting valuable contents.

Curved Stave

This unusual stave may derive from a specialised vessel associated with food processing or dairying, showing the diversity of containers in use at Drumclay.

Hoop

Hoops held vessel staves tightly together and maintained the structural integrity of buckets and tubs. Without components such as this, coopered vessels could not function.