

6. MATERIAL CULTURE

The promontory fort at Drumanagh, Co. Dublin, has proven to be a rich source of Roman material since the 1950's when ploughing revealed sherds of Roman pottery (now lost: Bateson 1973, 70). Artefacts have been recovered as stray finds, as the result of ploughing, unauthorised metal-detecting and following motorbike scrambling. While the emphasis has been placed on the imported finds it is important to note that a range of artefacts recovered indicate a site in use from earliest times to the medieval period.

6.1. Topographical Files

There are 72 items listed in the National Museum of Ireland's topographical files as items recovered from the townland of Drumanagh. A further nine items were listed originally as Drumanagh but are in fact from the fields immediately to the south of the promontory that are within the townland of Rush (refer Appendix 2). The finds from Drumanagh were submitted to the Museum as the result of singular incidents of stray finds or groups of objects recovered after specific incidents of ploughing. The latter includes fourteen objects recovered in 1977 when a broad band of tillage (10-15m in width) diagonally across the promontory and a single furrow c.10m from the defences and the cliff edge around the site was ploughed. Traces of habitation sites and concentration of winkle shells and animal bones were identified. Flint flakes, pottery, and an early medieval copper alloy pin indicate multi-period settlement.

Among the mix of pottery in the Museum's assemblage which includes coarse and medieval wares are sherds of imported pottery. A large (0.4m x 0.23m) potsherd (1977:1222) has been tentatively identified as Dressel 20 amphorae which are Spanish pottery of 1st-early 3rd century date. A tiny sherd of Samian ware (1980:031) appears to derive from the plain shoulder of a decorated beaker Dechelette 67. This form was manufactured in both south and central Gaul in the latter half of the first century and into the first two decades of the second century AD.

The only metal artefact discovered as a stray find (as opposed to metal-detected) is that of a seal box (2004:174) recovered from the eastern side of the ramparts in the upcast of motorbike scrambling in 2004 by local historian Cmdt. Paddy Boyle. The seal box is lozenge-shaped and made of enamelled copper alloy is of 1st-3rd century AD date. Seal boxes were interpreted as devices for securing personal communications and private letters (Bateson 1981) and therefore associated with the spread of Latin literacy across the Empire. However recent research has found the design features of seal boxes are unsuitable for attaching to documents and it is much more likely that they were used for sealing bags of coinage (Daffy 2013, 99)



Plate 32: Seal box lid from Drumanagh. Photo by Sean Daffy

6.2. Metal Detected Finds

Drumanagh promontory fort was subject to illegal metal-detecting for many years and significant objects were removed from a sale in 1995 at Sothebys by Mr Eamonn Kelly, National Museum of Ireland. The corpus of metal-detected material of c.150 objects was subsequently subject to legal proceedings. Members of the LIARI project viewed a portion of the collection in 2012

‘it appears to comprise a wide range of objects including personal items such as finger rings, dolphin fibulae, trumpet fibulae and several umbonate enamelled plate brooches. ..There are several whole and unfinished Raftery Type D and decorated horse-bits and Y-shaped pendants,, several bronze cinerary vessels and a wide range of metalwork including mounts and rings..there are also around 40 whole and partial copper, bronze and brass ingots...there is a piece of tile or brick that appears of Roman type but may be later...there are approximately sixteen coins’ (Cahill Wilson 2014, 26).

A catalogue of this collection, compiled by Mr Eamonn Kelly and Dr Lynda Mulvin is due to be completely shortly (Eamonn Kelly pers. comm).

Roger Bland published a report on eighteen bronze coins of Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian and Antoninus Pius (AD 81-160) believed to have been scattered across Drumanagh promontory fort, recovered from unauthorised metal-detecting and now in the National Museum of Ireland. The coins are corroded and two show signs of having been cleaned. Bland concludes that on the basis of the coin evidence contact between Drumanagh and the Romanised world started in the reign of Domitian (AD 81-96), and ended around AD 150, and that trading activities would be the most likely explanation for their presence at Drumanagh (Bland, 2014).

7. BIODIVERSITY

The site was first described in terms of its natural assets by John Rutty in 1772;

‘The soil of the county in general is poor. The richest spot by repute is at Dromanagh near Kenure by the seaside on the estate of Sir Robert Echlin; it is said that 23 acres of it will fatten a great number of cattle in half a year than I dare to mention and sheep afterwards. The soil is like garden-mould and from 9 to 12 inches deep.....It is said to purge Cattle new put into it which is imputed to the Spray of the Sea which is near it. The Herbage is purple and white clover, plenty of thistles and nettles, Ray-grafs, *Bents* or *Gramen cristatum*¹ and *Gramen vernum spica laxa*²’.



Plate 33: Evidence for nesting birds at Drumanagh. Courtesy of Derek Redmond

Today the site consists mainly of rank unmanaged grassland which makes it a locally valuable site for wildlife, given the intensive agricultural management of the surrounding countryside. Drumanagh is not currently designated as a protected site by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, however the extensive headland provides numerous habitats. During summer 2017, a suite of surveys were carried out by Roughan Environmental, commissioned by Fingal County Council to characterise the site. The site is primarily composed of grassland, but also includes hedgerows, scrub, embankment, a drainage

¹ Likely to be *Cynosurus cristatus* or ‘Crested dog's-tail’, Dr Gerry Clabby, pers. comm.

² Modern day *Anthoxanthum odoratum* or ‘Sweet-Vernal Grass’ Dr Gerry Clabby pers.comm.

ditch, sea cliffs and rocky sea-shore. The grassland provides nesting habitat for ground-nesting birds, including Skylark and Meadow Pipit. The embankment and cliff edges, where dense, tussocky grasses cannot develop, incorporates a relatively species-rich grassland, which supports Common Lizard. The surveys, including botanical, mammal, bird and non-native species, identified 32 bird species, two bat species, two mammal species and 46 species of vascular plant, including one non-native species.

A key element of the project was to identify enhancement measures that could be employed to further improve the ecological value of the site. In order to prevent the natural succession of the grasslands at Drumanagh Headland to scrub, and to promote a more species-rich grassland, it was recommended that a mowing regime should be put in place. It is anticipated that herbaceous species such as Lady's Bed-straw, Yarrow and clovers will colonise the grassland once a mowing regime is employed. Operating a different mowing regime in different sections of the headland and not mowing some areas in a given year would also promote greater habitat and species diversity. The mowing regime should seek to provide grazing for wintering geese and waders, and nesting habitat for ground-nesting birds in spring and summer.

One small patch of Spanish Bluebell, an invasive species was identified during the surveys. This stand should be dug out in spring when the leaves are visible. The scrub on the northern side of the headland should be retained as cover for wildlife.

It was also found that wildlife on Drumanagh Headland is subject to significant disturbance from recreational activities including walkers, dogs and motorbikes. Kestrel, which were in the recent past recorded nesting on the cliffs, have apparently abandoned the site, which may be as a result of disturbance from motorbikes. People using the area should be encouraged to keep dogs on a short leash to avoid disturbance to ground nesting birds.