# IDEAL HOMES

## Domestic Materiality and Past Identities



Edited by
Rena Maguire

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# *Ideal Homes*

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# INTRODUCING *IDEAL HOMES*

Rena Maguire

*What happened is, we grew lonely*
*living among the things,*
*so we gave the clock a face,*
*the chair a back,*
*the table four stout legs*
*which will never suffer fatigue.*

*We fitted our shoes with tongues*
*as smooth as our own*
*and hung tongues inside bells*
*so we could listen*
*to their emotional language,*

*and because we loved graceful profiles*
*the pitcher received a lip,*
*the bottle a long, slender neck.*

*Even what was beyond us*
*was recast in our image;*
*we gave the country a heart,*
*the storm an eye,*
*the cave a mouth*
*so we could pass into safety.*

Things, Lisel Mueller

## Introducing 'Ideal Homes'

We make gods in our own images – sometimes they are our wildest dreams and wildest fears, the superheroes of their eras, controlling storms, love, wealth and natural disasters, but other, more practical deities have existed, sitting watching the activities of mortals from kitchen table and local crossroads. The Romans called them the *lares*, but they likely took the idea of domestic deities from other cultures. These were lesser spirits who watched over places where people did day-to-day things, and sometimes helped out. It is possible these household gods are remembered, or are distant relatives of, everything from Cornish Brownies to Shakespeare's mercurial Puck and even in fiction, Harry Potter's Dobbie the House Elf. All share a concern for daily living and perhaps some wishful thinking that some unseen hand would wash and stack the dishes.

Many years ago now, when working in Cerveteri, in Tuscany, Italy, we gained access to the great grass domed burial mounds. Those vibrant, saucy Etruscans, who moved through life with music everywhere, did not go into the darkness without home comforts. One stone funeral bier had a carved pillow, with two indents worked in, a small infant-sized one, and a large one, as if mother and child had just woken and went to watch the dawn together, or perhaps to make a prosaic nappy change! The other tomb was painted with murals, turning it into a representation of a gloriously chaotic Italian home, replete with a myriad different kitchen utensils, a scrappy little dog waiting opportunistically for food to fall from the counter, and a plump cat eyeing a painted mouse, for who could exist without any of these things in eternity? Who would want to?

That painted household illustrated our need as humans for home, be it temporary or permanent, mobile or fixed, and domestic objects. These are not necessarily the objects of the great and the good. Household objects from any period of human existence represent the fabric of our lives, speaking volumes of who we are, or want to be. As archaeological evidence they are absorbent artefacts, holding time, emotions, events, extinct music - memories of people long gone - within metal, clay, fabric, glass or plastic. They tell stories of 'roots', of identity and ambitions as well as being purely practical functional things. As archaeologists, we use many ways to help these objects – and buildings – speak. All we do is tell their stories with the help of new objects.

It's very much my pleasure then to introduce this first volume of *Via Archaeologia*. The stories represent the culture and concept of home and domestic life in all its variations around the world. Charles Mount, a much-respected stalwart of Irish archaeology presents a masterful overview of domestic life in the Bronze Age. The tireless Cormac McSparron suggests reasons for the peculiar absence of ceramics during the Iron Age in Ireland and other parts of the western Atlantic region, while Naomi Carver takes up the development of societies (and individuals) through the kinds of pottery used and traded between Ireland and Britain on the brink of the modern world, weaving in her own heirloom family china, reminding us that we may tell other people's stories, but our own memories and emotions are intrinsically caught up in what we study.

The fierce intellect of JJ Ó Néill places the (often dreaded) feature of the burnt mound, or *fulacht fiadh/ skärvstenshögar,* depending on where you are in the world, into a much more vital and fascinating context, seeing them as multi-purpose heating features, the Aga cooker of the Bronze Age, perhaps! Building on the idea of domestic structures, we present José Luis Punzo's diorama of the pre-Hispanic Mayan city of Tzintzuntzan, in Mexico, with all the complexities and nuances of a modern city. Moving back to western Europe, I was lucky enough to work with the talented and perceptive archaeologists Kate Taylor and Jordana Maguire on the post excavation of a pair of smithies in County Cork, resulting in a wistful story of technological change, from the horse-powered farms of the past, and the encroaching world of mechanisation. We end with a serving of good food and home comforts from Lutz Zweibel, for what would a home be without hospitality. This fascinating experimental archaeology project has produced very real evidence of the use of vegetarian rennet in prehistory, offering archaeologists and palynologists something to mull over and consider in soil samples.

The stunning cover image is by permission of Prof Aidan O'Sullivan, of the reconstructed Irish early medieval house at the Centre for Experimental and Material Culture (CEAMC) in University College Dublin, a project which inspires students to think of domestic archaeology every year.

My thanks to all authors, and to the hard-working reviewers who carried out their respective tasks with grace, kindness and good humour. All needs to be said now is take off your coat, pull up a chair and settle

down with something to drink, perhaps something to eat – you're at home, enjoy the stories, for that's what all archaeology is!

*Rena Maguire*
*University College Dublin*

# AT HOME IN THE IRISH BRONZE AGE

CHARLES MOUNT*

## Abstract

*What makes a home? At its most basic, walls and roof to keep out the elements, a doorway, a fire for warmth, plus family, pets, and friends. But there is more. A home is also the place where we keep the possessions we value. A snapshot of the contents of a home at any moment tells us about the people who live there and the things they value. However, the archaeological record is mostly made of the remains of abandoned houses, from which the things of value have been removed. To accurately describe the variety of material that potentially filled the Bronze Age home we must look very broadly at the archaeology of the period. In recent decades development-led excavations in Ireland have uncovered a wealth of new evidence for Bronze Age settlement and domestic life. At the time of writing there is evidence for about 290 Bronze Age settlements and more than 620 structures in Ireland. This chapter uses this new evidence to describe the architecture and internal arrangements of the buildings, and the range of activities carried out. It looks at the range of material associated with the houses to build up a picture of what the Bronze Age home was like.*

Keywords: Bronze Age; Domestic; Artefacts; Ireland; Household

## I. Houses

The house was the essential Irish Bronze Age structure. They provided shelter for people, their possessions, craft production, and hosted domestic life. Of the various house forms the most common type, like Britain, northern France and southern Italy, was the roundhouse,

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although some oval, D-shaped, rectangular, and asymmetrical structures were also built. This contrasted with mainland Europe where rectangular houses were more common, with long houses in the north and shorter and smaller rectangular houses in central and south-east Europe (Brück and Fokkens 2013, 83). Most Irish houses were built with circular post arrangements and trenches or low walls with woven wattle and thatched conical roofs. Some houses had the addition of porches and drains to keep walls and floors dry. There were also additional external structures that were used as cookhouses, storehouses, workshops, granaries and animal sheds and pens.

Most houses had earthen floors, sometime covered with cobbles or flags and perhaps straw or matting. Some had wooden sub-floors, like the lakeside settlement at Clonfinlough, Co. Offaly, where three houses with floors made from boxes formed by ash wattle filled with ash logs covered with stone flags were preserved by peat (Moloney et al. 1993, 17-26) (Fig. 1). The Ballinderry II, Co. Offaly lakeside settlement had rectangular houses supported by rectangular oak base plates into which the wall uprights were pegged.

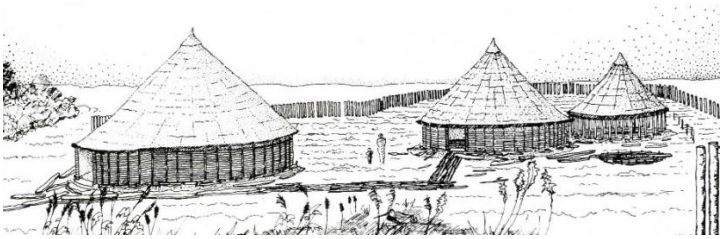


Fig. 1. Reconstruction drawing of the Late Bronze Age Houses at Clonfinlough, Co. Offaly by Margaret Keane (after Moloney et al. 1993).

Several houses have evidence for internal divisions and were divided radially or concentrically. At Ballydrehid, Co. Tipperary two Middle Bronze Age houses were divided by walls supported by stake and post-holes that ran radially though the centre of each. Structure A was divided into two rooms each with a hearth, and structure B was divided into three rooms (McQuade et al. 2009, 51-57). Cloghabreedy, Co. Tipperary structure D had two concentric spaces, an internal circular area had a partition supported by stakes with a central gap that allowed access between rooms. This was enclosed by a concentric corridor formed by a

post ring that allowed access from the porched entrance around the house perimeter (ibid, 41-2).

Hearths were used for cooking, heating water and stone, processing food, and for lighting and warmth. Although hearths provide the only evidence for artificial lighting in the houses, other means could have been used, like the chips of Scots pine used to light the copper mines at Mount Gabriel, Co. Cork (O'Brien 1994, 158-60). Hearths could be located either within or outside the house. At Cloghabreedy heated stone was used in open air roasting pits and open-air cooking pits were used at Suttonrath, Co. Tipperary (McQuade et al. 2009, 43-4). Stake and post settings around hearths were found in houses at Chancellorsland, Curraghatoor, Killemly, and Ballylegan, Co. Tipperary and Tober, Co. Offaly and probably supported racks and suspension devices for pots and drying and smoking racks (Doody 2007 and 2008; McQuade et al. 2009, 67, 71; Walsh 2014, 11-16).

Pottery from settlements such as Townparks, Co. Antrim and Chancellorsland had soot and scorch marks from cooking fires (Smith 2003, 39; Doody 2008, 288). Pots from Lough Gur, Co. Limerick have perforations beneath the rims that were probably used for suspension (Ó Ríordáin 1954, 338). Seasoned clay pots can cook wet dishes like soups and stews as well as fish, poultry, and meat. At Lough Gur and Ballydrehid and Ballylegan Co. Tipperary heated pot-boiler stones were used to cook the pot contents (Cleary 1995, 53; McQuade et al. 2009, 54, 67). Whole pigs and sheep/goat, or cattle parts could be cooked in earthen roasting pits. At Middle Bronze Age Cloghabreedy several houses had external roasting pits containing animal bone and charred cereals (McQuade et al. 2009, 62-4). No Bronze Age baking ovens are known, but coarse flat breads could be baked using a flat stone placed over a hearth.

Houses were also used for storage. Grain was stored in sealed pits dug into the house floors. Some houses had internal segmented ditches that were covered and probably functioned as under-floor cool stores or larders. Some items like pottery were stored standing upright and in pits. Other items were likely suspended from rafters or upright timbers either singly or in baskets or nets.

No Irish Bronze Age furniture is known, but by at least at least 1400 BC folding chairs had come into use in Northern Europe (Coles and Harding 1979, 314). Several wooden objects assembled with mortice and

tenon joints found at Must Farm, Cambridgeshire may be furniture fragments (Marchini 2016). There is more information regarding built-in fixtures. At Townparks, Co. Antrim, Smith (2003, 43) suggested a linear floor slot in House B held the uprights for a warp-weighted loom. At Tober, Co. Offaly four grouped post-holes/stake-holes in a house close to a boiling pit that contained a spindle whorl, may also have been a loom foundation (Walsh 2014, 18).

Various activities are indicated by hearths, pits and stake-holes found in the open spaces surrounding the houses. At Cloghabreedy stake-holes and slot-trenches formed fences that probably defined the house curtilage (McQuade et al. 2009, 40). At Chancellorsland, Co. Tipperary stake-holes appeared to form the supports for racks and stands (Doody 2008, 227). Chancellorsland open air structure 23 was a double row of thirty stake-holes about 0.5m apart that supported a bow-shaped structure 50m long, possibly a single structure or paired racks (Doody 2008, 246-7). Racks were probably used for drying and processing material for food preparation and preservation, thatching, fibre production, etc.

## II. Metal

Metal was an important resource, and we know from the study of Bronze Age metal finds that a wide variety of weapons, tools and ornaments were made from copper and copper alloy (see e.g. Harbison 1969, Eogan 1983) (Fig. 2). The metalwork included axes, daggers, dirks, swords, spears, trumpets, crotals, socketed hammerheads, flat and trunnion chisels, gravers, sickles, socketed and tanged knives, saws, anvils, vices, tweezers, flesh hooks, razors, torcs, rings and bracelets. Ornaments such as ribbon, flanged and bar torcs, bracelets and neckrings and armlets, and tress-rings were also made of gold. These artefacts are usually found in hoards, single finds, or burials but rarely in settlements or houses. When metalworking evidence is found in settlements it is usually in the form of non-metallic stone or clay moulds and crucibles.

Only a few Early Bronze Age settlements have metalwork evidence. A razor was found in a house at Carrigatogher Site 3, Co. Tipperary, a lump of copper alloy in House B at Downpatrick, Co. Down, metalworking slags at Ballyarnet, Co. Derry and copper smelting slag at Ballybrowney, Co. Cork (Mulcahy and Taylor 2013; Pollock et al. 1964, 54; Ó Néill and Plunkett 2007; Cotter 2005, 40-41). There is a little more

evidence for metalworking in the Middle Bronze Age. At Chancellorsland two crucible fragments were found in a hearth in structure 15. A lump of copper alloy was found close to a Bronze Age house at Danesfort, Co. Kilkenny and four dolerite moulds for casting palstaves, chisels, and rods, came from Corrstown, Co. Derry (Doody 2008, 333; Devine 2010; Ginn and Rathbone 2012, 190-94). Lough Gur Site D had fragments of a stone palstave mould, clay spearhead mould and a crucible. Site F at Lough Gur (a probable forge) had two hearths, a possible casting pit, bronze casting waste and clay moulds for looped spearheads, rapiers, and knives (Ó Ríordáin 1954).

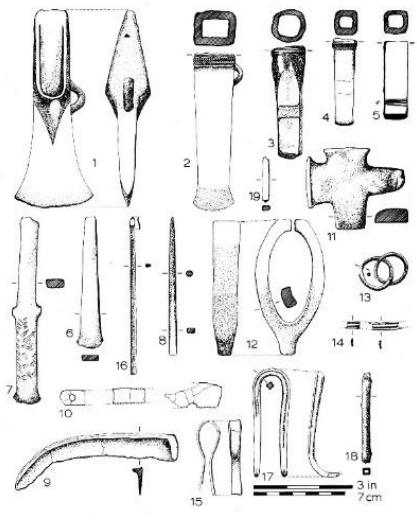



Fig. 2. The Bishopsland hoard of tools, consisting of 1. palstave, 2. Looped socketed axehead, 3-5. Socketed hammerheads, 6. flat chisel, 7. trunnion chisel, 8. graver, 9. non-socketed sickle, 10. saw, 11. anvil, 12. vice, 13. rings, 14. ribbed bracelet, 15. tweezers, 16. toilet article, 17. flesh hook, 18. tube, 19. bar (after Eogan 1983).

Most metalworking evidence dates from the Late Bronze Age. At Dún Aonghasa, Inis Mór, Co. Galway sherds of five crucibles and 460 clay mould fragments for casting swords, spearheads, knives bracelets, pins, rings, bracelets, socketed axes, and other socketed tools were found (O'Carroll 2012, 28-44). Outside the central enclosure of the Hillfort at Rathgall, Co. Wicklow a metalworking area with post-holes had clay moulds for swords, spearheads, socketed axes, gouges, and chisels (Waddell 2010, 285-7). At Ballylegan, Co. Tipperary clay spearhead mould fragments were found in an originally wood-lined trough within structure A (McQuade et al. 2009, 69-73). Clay mould fragments were

also found at the possible crannog at Rathtinaun, Co. Sligo (Raftery 1994, 32-5). At Must Farm, Cambridgeshire a Late Bronze Age palisaded pile-dwelling settlement of at least five sub-circular stilted structures was suddenly destroyed by fire while still occupied, and the settlement and its contents was preserved in the inaccessible alluvial silts of a palaeochannel (Knight et al. 2019). Excavation has recovered 90 pieces of metalwork including socketed axes, hammers, gouges, hooks, chisels, sickles, punches, axes, swords, and spears that would have been kept and used in and around the houses. The survival of significant quantities of metal in a settlement that was suddenly and catastrophically destroyed supports the suggestion that metal was carefully removed from abandoned settlements.

## III. Pottery

Pottery was broadly used for storage and transport of water and dry stuffs as well as cooking, and is the most frequently found item in the Bronze Age home. Pottery was made from locally available clays in and around the home and fired in simple pits like those found at Cloghabreedy (McQuade et al. 2009, 30-31). Pottery also provided a medium for expression resulting in a succession of styles commencing with beakers, and transitioning through food vessels, and urns to plain coarse wares (Brindley 2007). Pottery was made in a range of sizes for cooking, eating, drinking and storage. Beakers (c. 2450-1900 BC) vary in size from small drinking cups to large storage containers (Waddell 2010, 122-3; Case 1995, 56). Analysis of the beakers from Newgrange, Co. Meath identified closed fabrics suitable for liquids or dry substances, open fabrics for evaporation, and fabrics that could withstand thermal shock for cooking (Cleary 1983).

Food vessels replaced beakers after c. 2170-2075 BC (Bayliss and O'Sullivan 2013). Bowl-shaped food vessels have been found in settlements at Coney Island, Co. Armagh, French Furze, Co. Kildare, Roughan Hill, Co. Clare, and Magheragallan, Co. Donegal and were used to prepare and serve food (Brindley 2007, 169; Addyman 1965; Ó Maoldúin 2008; Jones 2008, 42, 45; Waddell 2010, 154). There are also small cups known in this style (Kavanagh 1977, 62, Nos. 9 and 62). Vase-shaped food vessels appeared a little later c. 2115-2035 BC and were found in settlements at Dogstown, Co. Tipperary and Tonyquin, Co. Cavan (McQuade et al. 2009, 32; O'Connell and O'Hara 2011, 82-3).

Organic lids have not survived but there are several examples with pottery lids from graves at Coolcarron, Co. Cork, Ballinchalla, Co. Mayo, Annaghkeen, Co. Galway, and Danesfort, Co. Kilkenny. Some smaller cups in this style had handles like the example from Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow (Cahill and Sikora 2011, 295-96; Ó Ríordáin and Waddell 1993, Nos. 407, 514, 537, 458) (Fig. 3).

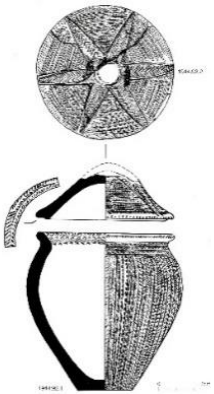


Fig. 3. Lidded vase food vessel from a grave at Ballinchalla, Co. Mayo (after Cahill and Sikora 2011).

Urns developed from food vessels after c. 2075-1960 BC. Vase urn sherds have been found at Woodstown 8, Co. Waterford (O'Hara and Ginn 2011). Encrusted urns resemble vase urns with the addition of applied clay decoration. Collared urns, with distinctive concave necks and collared rims, appeared after c. 2075-1880 BC in burials in the north and east of Ireland (Kavanagh 1976, 329-31; Waddell 2010, 158-61). There are also small cup versions of the urns (Kavanagh 1977, 62, Nos. 9 and 62).

Cordoned urns appeared after c. 1825-1620 BC. They were either straight-sided, barrel-shaped, bucket-shaped, or waisted vessels, or bowls and drinking vessels with external clay cordons (Waddell 2010, 124; Kavanagh 1976). They were found at settlements such as Ballyarnett, Co. Derry, Cloghabreedy, Ballybrowney, Co. Cork and Lough Gur (Ó Néill 2004; McQuade et al. 2009; Cotter 2005; Grogan and Roche 2009, 129).

In the Middle Bronze Age plain coarse pottery consisting of buckets, and cone and convex-shaped containers with broad flat bases and wide mouths replaced urns. The largest quantity of coarse pottery, over 9,000 sherds representing about 483 vessels, is from the settlement at

Corrstown, Co. Derry. These were barrel-shaped or straight-sided vessels with wide mouths and small bowls. A quarter were decorated with incised, impressed, rilled, indented or cordoned decoration. Most of the pottery had carbonised residues indicating cooking use (Roche and Grogan 2012). At Chancellorsland about 2,000 sherds representing about 760 vessels related to cordoned urns were found and about a quarter were decorated (Fig. 4). There were small cups, tubby jars with narrow bases and straight-sided buckets. Many vessels had lids set on internally bevelled rims. The Chancellorsland pots also have external soot accretions and charred internal residues relating to cooking (Cleary 2008).

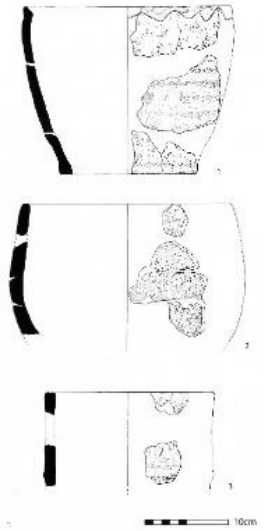



Fig. 4. Pottery from Chancellorsland, Co. Tipperary.
1. decorated tubby-jar, 2. globular bowl, 3. straight-sided vessel with a cordon (after Doody 2008).

Coarse undecorated pottery continued in use during the Late Bronze Age. Vessels had rough surfaces with protruding grits and were most commonly flat-bottomed buckets, open basins, and necked shapes with upright or slightly curved sides, ranging from small tubs to larger vessels. A large bucket recovered from Clonfinlough was 49.5cm high (Moloney et al. 1993) (Fig. 5). Large quantities of coarse pottery were found at Dún Aonghasa and Mooghaun, Co. Clare. At Dún Aonghasa 3,500 sherds represented about 130-340 flat-based, bucket-shaped, and probably lidded pots of varying sizes (Cotter 2012 Vol 2, 8-26). At Mooghaun there were 482 sherds representing at least twenty vessels (Grogan 2005, Vol 1, 317-28). Other settlements, like Curraghatoor, Co. Tipperary, had