

# **Ash Bowl belonging to our prehistoric ancestors**

At the National Museum of Ireland in Kildare Street in Dublin, there is an ancient wooden bowl made of Ash. The bowl was discovered in peat at the Killow townland, Co. Clare during the construction of the Ennis bypass in 2006. There is a detailed report on the finding, prepared for Clare County Council by Kate Taylor, TVAS Ireland Ltd. The following is detailed extracts were edited by Brendan Collins from the Final Archaeological Excavation Report for Clare County Council by Kate Taylor, TVAS Ireland Ltd. on the ash bowl discovered during the excavation work.

## **Wooden bowl**

A piece of a wooden bowl was found in peat layer. The bowl was sent to ArchCon Labs for species identification and conservation. The vessel has a maximum external diameter of 225mm and a maximum internal diameter of 205mm. The surviving portion of the bowl is 100mm high and the wood is 10mm thick and has been identified by Lorna O'Donnell (ArchCon Labs) as *Fraxinus excelsior* (Common Ash or European Ash). This type of tree seldom becomes older than 250 years.



Wooden bowl in peat.

## *Conservation*

The bowl was conserved by Cathy Daly/Erica Devine of Archcon Labs. There are no obvious turning lines, indicative of lathe manufacture, but there are two carved ridges that may represent the beginning of a rim detail or perhaps the upper part of the bowl.

The bowl on recovery was extremely soft and degraded and in five larger, and two small, pieces.

The bowl was cleaned with a soft brush and water. The bowl fragments were then frozen and freeze-dried until dry to touch. The bowl was reassembled with Mowilith DM427 adhesive and packed in an Addis box with acid-free tissue paper.



Iron Age Wooden bowl in sections

#### *Radiocarbon determination*

A radiocarbon determination was made from a sample of wood from the bowl. A piece of wood, weighing 250mg, was taken from the edge of the bowl and dated by the Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory, Queen's University Belfast. The fragment of wood returned a date of  $2461 \pm 32$  (2 sigma Cal BC 777 to 407). Ash trees live for no longer than 250 years and it can therefore be stated with confidence that the bowl dates to the Iron Age.

#### *Parallels for the wooden bowl*

Of the few dozen prehistoric wooden bowls that have been discovered in Ireland or Scotland, most are from non-archaeological peat digging in the north of Ireland. Earwood (1989/90) has demonstrated clear typological affinities between wooden bowls and cauldrons and these same vessel types made in bronze. Radiocarbon dating has shown that many wooden bowls were manufactured in the late prehistoric period. The bowl is similar in form to some of the other vessels from this period but incomplete survival means that there is no evidence of the handles that characterize those bowls. The lack of tool marks, on what are likely to be lathe-turned bowls, is typical and probably reflects high quality finishing by sanding or polishing the vessels. The bowl is made from ash and this wood is seemingly unusual as the other examples are mostly alder. Given the lack of pottery in the Iron Age, wooden vessels must have played a significant role in daily life, and Earwood observes that, given the fineness of manufacture of many of the wooden vessels, this indicates that they were not merely 'poor man's substitutes' for metal vessels but were highly prized alternatives.

The wooden bowl, found in close proximity to the burnt stone spread, has been dated to the period 777 BC to 407 BC and while this is at least 230 years later, given the long period of use of burnt stone spreads evidenced on other sites, there is the possibility that the bowl and spread are related. Perhaps the bowl was used to contain hot water or for food consumption.



This bowl can be viewed in the National Museum of Ireland in Kildare Street, Dublin

A full copy of the Final Archaeological Excavation Report for Clare County Council by Kate Taylor, TVAS Ireland Ltd. is available to download from the following web address:  
[http://www.ennisbypass.ie/files/admin/uploads/W105\\_F\\_2477\\_19137.pdf](http://www.ennisbypass.ie/files/admin/uploads/W105_F_2477_19137.pdf).