

ENNISKILLEN CASTLE

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Devenish Island Damhinish (Island of oxen)

Factsheet



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



Devenish Island (Damhinish, island of oxen)

- Monastic settlement founded by St. Molaise on Devenish Island in the 6th century.
- St. Molaise was an early missionary in Fermanagh, converting the locals to the new Christian faith.
- The monastery on Devenish was to become a place of great religious and spiritual importance for the next 1000 years.



- Monastic settlements also served as “towns” in Ireland at this time. In addition to the monastery, church, and refectory, monastic sites often had a guesthouse, school, mud huts and a dairy. Children were educated and fostered in monasteries.
- Sacred and secular manuscripts were copied and illuminated in monasteries.
- The most important relic from Devenish is the Soiscel Molaise, or book shrine of St. Molaise.
- The Annals of Ulster record that in 837, “all the churches of Loch Erne, together with Cluain Eois and Daimhinish (Devenish Island) were destroyed by the gentiles (Vikings).” The monastery was rebuilt after these invasions.



- Round Towers (Irish cloicthech, bell house), are a feature of Irish monasteries rebuilt after the Viking invasions. The tower served as a watchtower, a belfry and as a place of refuge for people and valued treasures and books. The

Devenish tower is one of the finest in Ireland, reflecting the wealth of the monastery. The tower was either built soon after a fire in 1157 or after 1176.



Major reforms during the 12th century sought to bring Ireland into line with European practice. These changes brought about a new organisational structure. By this time Devenish was a large, busy community.

By the 15th and 16th centuries there were two communities living on Devenish: The Canons Regular in St. Mary's Priory and the secular canons, called Culdees in the lower church.

St Molaise's House is a small church dating from the twelfth century. The present stone building was built to replace a wooden church burned in the 1157 fire. The massive walls and the decoration at its angles, show that St Molaise's House was a very special building.

The name, St Molaise's 'House', suggests that remains of the founding saint were buried in the church.



Teampull Mór, or the lower church, dates from the early 13th century with a beautifully moulded south window. It was later extended to include a residential wing to the north and the Maguire Chapel to the south.

St Mary's Augustinian Priory or Abbey is on the highest ground on the island and is built outside the original monastic settlement. It was begun by Augustinian Canons in the 12th century but the early abbey was destroyed by fire.

Matthew O'Duggan reconstructed it in 1449. The priory was extended to include a refectory, cloister walk and other rooms, while the west doorway was rebuilt, the tower added and windows were replaced.



Graveyards on Devenish. A Place of Burial.

Devenish was an important burial place for at least 1,300 years, from the mid 6th century to the later 19th century.

The lower graveyard's boundary wall was attached to Teampull Mór. The latest tombstone is dated 1867. Two stones carved with the armorial bearings of the Maguires of Tempo are built into the chapel on the south side of Teampull Mór which was the Maguire burial vault (until about 1865).

Devenish Island has been uninhabited since 1922