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The "Tipperary Brooch":
A Reprovenance

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INTRODUCTION

The majority of our most important antiquities were discovered in the nineteenth century, at a time when the population of the country reached its maximum and when a much greater proportion of the land was being worked by hand than ever before. Many of these found their way into the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy. The Museum's collections date from the end of the eighteenth century; but it was not until the 1830s that antiquities began to be collected on a large scale.

Acquisitions were approved by the Committee of Antiquities. These were sometimes donated, but were often bought from dealers and private collectors or directly from the finders. A proper registration system was not devised until the 1850s, so that details of when and where many objects were acquired before that time were not recorded.

This was the case with the silver brooch known as the "Tipperary Brooch"[1]. It bears the registration number 17.W.42, given to it by Sir William Wilde, who produced a number of catalogues of the collection in the mid-nineteenth century. His notes for a catalogue of silver ornaments were published many years after his death in 1915. Here the brooch is described as having been found in Co. Tipperary and that it was bought for £8 2s 2d.[2]

Until recently this was all that was known about the find circumstances. Now, however, further information has been uncovered by my colleague Mary Cahill in the Rough Minute Books of the Committee of Antiquities.

On 9th April, 1842, the following entry occurs:

> Mr. Clibborn having exhibited an ancient silver brooch inlaid with gold and found in the Co. Tipperary which he purchased on his own responsibility for the Academy for the sum of £8 2s 2d.

A note attached to the page records:

> Silver Pin - bought by Edwd Clibborn Found in the County of Tipperary ·· within a mile of Templemore - place called Lockmore - parish of same name by Wm Maguire in the month of March 1842 for £8-&2.2. expenses.

The brooch can therefore be provenanced to Loughmoe, in the north-east of the county, about three miles south of Templemore. Loughmoe lies in the townland of Tinvoher, and in 1827 the names of Jeremiah and William Maguire are recorded as tenants of Sir George Goolds in that townland. The Griffith Valuation of 1850 lists two holdings owned by William Maguire.

Mr. Michael Maguire of Whitefield, Templemore, has informed the writer that his farm in the townland of Whitefield, which adjoins Tinvoher, was purchased from relatives of the earlier Maguires. However, there are no Maguires listed as owning land in Whitefield for the relevant period in either the Tithe Applotment Books or in Griffith's Valuation. On present evidence, it seems more likely that if William Maguire made the find on his own lands (which is by no means certain), the find was made in the townland of Tinvoher.

Edward Clibborn was the assistant secretary of the Academy, who later became curator of its Museum. As in many other instances, he had bought the brooch directly from the finder and was later reimbursed by the Committee of Antiquities.

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The brooch is considerably damaged. The pin head was broken and repaired, presumably in the last century, and there are a number of cracks in the terminal plates. The first published account of the brooch is found in an article on ancient Irish brooches which appeared in 1848.[3] The author, William Fairholt, visited Ireland in

FIG 1: *Silver Brooch, front, Loughmoe, Co. Tipperary.*

1843, where he saw and drew a number of brooches. The drawing of the Loughmoe brooch is inaccurate, and it shows the brooch as complete.

The brooch was exhibited in London at the South Kensington Museum in 1863, and is described as being decorated with four amber studs on the ring[4]. When published by Armstrong some 50 years later, one of the amber studs on the ring was shown as missing[5]. The loss appears to have occurred in the late nineteenth century.

A photograph of the brooch in an album in the National Museum, which is undated but on internal evidence was probably taken before 1900, shows the missing stud. The stud was located in the reserve collections in 1986 and was replaced in its correct position when the brooch was conserved in the National Museum that year.

DESCRIPTION

The brooch is of cast silver, partly gilt (Fig. 1). It consists of a ring and a freely moving pin. The design of the pin head reflects that of the terminals. The hoop of the ring is of plain silver, D-shaped in section, and continues partially into the broad terminals ending in tall hemispherical amber bosses.

The raised terminals are hollow at the back, as is the pin head, and are filled with lead. They stand out as curved trapezoidal areas of silver against a gilt border of interlace. They have convex surfaces and billeted edges. In the centre of each is a recessed lozenge-shaped panel containing a panel of gold filigree. The filigree panels on the terminals and pin head are all similar.

Beaded gold wires, forming a pattern of squares with corner loops with circles of wire at the centre and along each side, are soldered to sheets of gold foil. The rings of beaded wire surround small bosses in the foil pushed up from the back. The panels are framed by a beaded gold wire.

The terminals are bordered by broad panels of tightly woven six-strand ribbon interlace, which are gilt and set within raised frames. They are linked at the centre by a rectangular panel of interlace, and above and below by amber studs. A small loop projects from the back of the lower stud setting. This would originally have been used to fasten a cord or chain to the pin, to hold the ring in place.

The back of the ring is plain, except for two silver plates; these cover the hollow terminals which, like the pin head, are filled with lead (Fig. 2). These plates are decorated with a cross and circle design of beaded or billeted lines, which are gilt to emphasise the pattern. This beading also occurs on the front as a border to the raised areas of the terminals and pin head.
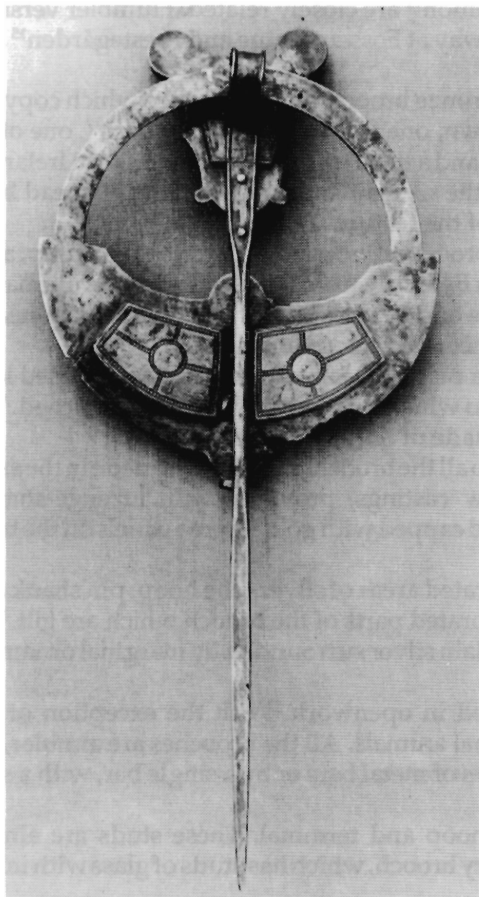
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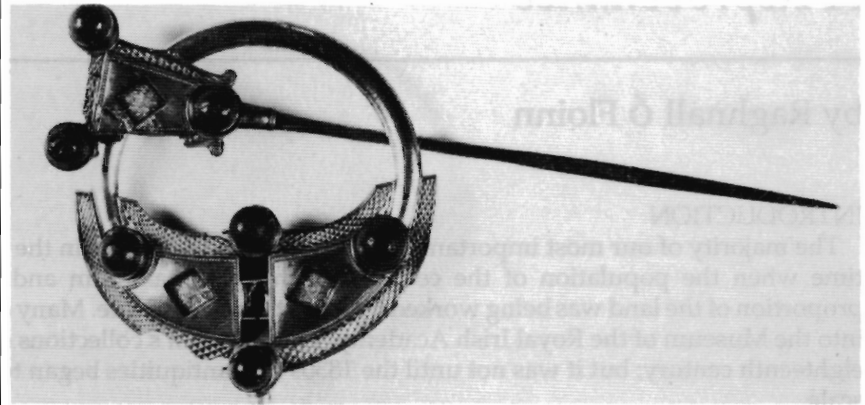
FIG 2:
Silver brooch, back, Loughmoe, Co. Tipperary.

During conservation work carried out on the brooch in 1963, one of the silver back plates was removed and the lead filling removed[6]. This measured some 6.25mm in thickness, and was shaped to fit the hollow in the back of the terminal. The upper edges of the filigree panel were held against slight inturned flanges on the underside of the lozenge-shaped opening, the foil insert resting in a shallow recess in the surface of the lead filling, perhaps held in place with a glue or mastic. The silver backing plates were held in raised flanges projecting from the trapezodial openings in the back of the terminals.

The removed plate measured 0.75mm in thickness and the decoration was chased, not cast. It was also noted that the cross decoration on the silver backing plates was laid out with a compass, the compass point being visible at the centre of the circle. The upper central amber stud of the ring was removed and was found to be mounted on a lead disc, which in turn was stuck on to a lead filling in the circular silver cell.

The pin is made in two parts. The keystone-shaped pin head is hollow and is fitted with a plain sheet of silver at the back. The top and sides bear recessed panels of four strand ribbon interlace, with projecting amber studs at the corners. The sides are damaged, but were decorated with spirals at the narrow end and trumpet-shaped projections at the centre. The shaft of the pin is hammered from a bar of silver.

The upper end is formed into a semi-circular loop, with raised edges and fastened at its lower edge to the pin head with two rivets; the upper end is damaged. The pin shaft below has raised side flanges. It is circular in section for about one-third of its length, and is broader and flatter below before narrowing towards the tip.

The pin is 24.3cm long, the ring 11.55cm in diameter, and the present weight of the brooch is 286.6 gr.

DISCUSSION

The Loughmoe brooch belongs to a group of six closely related silver annular brooches which have many features in common. These brooches include two of the four brooches from the Ardagh, Co. Limerick hoard[7]; one from Cahercommaun Fort, Co. Clare[8]: one from Killamery, Co. Kilkenny[9]; and a final example of uncertain provenance, although possibly from near Strokestown, Co. Roscommon (Fig. 3)[10].

The pin head of a silver brooch of this type was found in a Viking grave at Vinjum in Norway[11]. A much plainer silver brooch from near Tralee, Co. Kerry[12], a brooch said to have been found at Tara,

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Co. Meath[13] and a lost silver (?) brooch from Roscommon[14] are closely related. Humbler versions of the type are known from two Viking graves in Norway at Fossemsvatne and Prestegården[15] and from an unknown site in Ireland[16].

Apart from these true brooches, there are smaller bronze brooch-pins with rings which copy the form of the larger brooches. Three examples are known, one from Killaloe, Co. Clare[17], one other from the Viking cemetery at Islandbridge near Dublin and a third from an unknown site in Ireland[18]. The discussion of the type which follows is based on the six main examples and the pin head from Vinjum, although the related brooches share many of the features of the group.

It is proposed that the term "Ardagh type annular brooches" be used to describe the group, after the find which produced two examples. Like the "Tara Brooch" - from which the group is ultimately descended - these brooches have matching terminals and pin heads. All have square pin heads, except for that from Loughmoe. All have plain, undecorated hoops and pin shafts.

The pins are elaborately constructed, consisting of a cast pin head with separately attached loop at the back. These loops are provided with a socket, to which the shank of the pin is attached. The Loughmoe brooch is again the exception; its pin is made of only two pieces.

The matching pin head and terminals are common to all the brooches, and all are made in the same fashion. The terminals and pin heads were hollow castings, provided with lozenge-shaped openwork voids. The hollows were filled with lead and capped with gold filigree panels on the front and silver plaques on the back.

Gilding is sparingly used to contrast plain, undecorated areas of silver - the hoop, pin shank and the raised areas of pin head and terminals - with decorated parts of the brooch which are gilt. The terminal plates form discrete subtriangular areas of plain silver surrounded by marginal ornament which is gilt.

This ornament may be a solid casting or executed in openwork. With the exception of the Loughmoe brooch, this decoration consists of marginal animals. All the brooches are annular, the space between the terminals spanned either by a series of metal bars or by a single bar, with a stud setting above and below.

There is usually a third stud at the junction of hoop and terminal. These studs are almost universally of amber, the exception being the Killamery brooch, which has studs of glass with inlaid silver grilles and plain bosses of silver.

The backs of these brooches are plain, except for the plaques of silver which cover the lead filling of the terminals. The Killamery and "Strokestown" brooches have plaques, decorated with animal and interlace ornament, respectively. The decoration on the others consists of geometric patterns - the cross and circle device on the Loughmoe brooch being matched exactly in the same position on one of the Ardagh brooches (Fig. 4). Whatever the pattern, all of the plaques have billeted borders. This border is continued on the fronts of three brooches - the two Ardagh brooches and that from Loughmoe.

There is no independent way of dating these brooches, put a number of stylistic and typological features would suggest that the group should be dated broadly to the ninth century. Arguments in favour of such a date advanced elsewhere need not be repeated here[19]. Some indication of a ninth-century date is given by the occurrence of the Vinjum pin head, adapted as a brooch in its own right, in a Viking grave dated to the second half of the ninth century. The humbler versions of the type from Prestegården and Islandbridge also come from burials of ninth-century date.

Typologically, brooches of Ardagh type stand between the elaborate gilt and filigreed brooches with decorated hoops and studs of glass, enamel and amber, such as the "Tara" and Hunterston Brooches, and the ungilded silver bossed and 'thistle' brooches. The "Tara" type brooches date broadly to the eighth century[20], while the bossed and thistle brooches are dated by the occurrence in coin hoards to the later ninth and early tenth centuries[21]. Brooches of the eighth century often have panels of cast ornament on the hoop.

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The hoops of Ardagh type brooches are plain and may be of semi-circular or of circular section - a feature of the bossed and thistle brooches, respectively. The complex pin construction is found on eighth-century brooches, but the cast interlace ornament on the shafts of the latter is absent - another feature of ninth and tenth-century brooches. The beaded or billeted decoration, especially when used as a border, is commonly found on the bossed penannular brooch series.

Turning specifically to the Loughmoe brooch, it bears a number of features worthy of comment. The broad interlace decorated margins around the terminals is especially striking. The broad margin with cast interlace occurs on a brooch said to have been found at Tara, Co. Meath, and now in the British Museum. This brooch also has lozenge-shaped recesses in the pin head and in the terminals. The latter are hollow and are filled with lead, originally capped with silver plates. The pin head, although of a different shape, has the same arrangement of stud settings joined by interlaced panels, with scroll and trumpet patterns on the sides. The chip carved interlace on the Loughmoe brooch is of a very high standard. It is set within a raised border, and is best compared with similarly treated cast interlace on the large brooch from Ardagh and on the paten from the Derrynaflan hoard.

This might be an argument in favour of the Loughmoe brooch being early in the series, but the chronology of the period does not permit such precise dating. The other notable feature of this brooch is the height of the amber bosses, which are much taller than those of any other known brooch and are closer in dimensions to some of the silver bosses on the bossed penannular brooches. The complete stud examined in the 1963 conservation measured 6mm in height and 1.325cm. in width, narrowing slightly to 1.3cm at its base, which was flat.

The find place is of some interest. Loughmoe is identified in the Life of St. Ciaran of Saighir as *Rath Lochmuighe*, a fort of the chief householder of the king of Munster, Aillil[22]. Although the Life dates to the twelfth century, the episode referring to Loughmoe may preserve a tradition of an important settlement there, perhaps in the seventh or eighth century if the king referred to can be equated with Aillil Mac Cathail, king of Munster, who died in either 698 or 701 A.D.[23]

We cannot say whether there is any connection between the brooch and this settlement site of some importance; but the location of this brooch to Loughmoe emphasises the south midlands concentration of brooches of this type, and suggests that they were all most probably manufactured and used in this area. It is now becoming clear that many of these brooch types are confined to certain parts of the country, suggesting regional workshops and also regional preferences.

It is interesting that it is in this area also that most of the 'thistle' brooches are found, a pattern neatly exemplified by the fact that both types are represented in the Ardagh hoard. It is no coincidence either that the other decorated silver brooch from Co. Tipperary, the Roscrea Brooch, is very close in design and technique to that from Loughmoe.

FOOTNOTES
1. Most recently discussed by M. Ryan in S. Youngs (ed.): The Work of Angels: Masterpieces of Celtic Metalwork, 6th - 9th centuries A.D. (London 1989), No. 94.
2. E.C.R. Armstrong: Catalogue of the Silver and Ecclesiastical Antiquities in the Collection of the Royal Irish Academy by the late Sir William Wilde, M.D., M.R.I.A. (Proc. R.I.A., 32c, 1914-16), pp. 297-8.
3. F. W. Fairholt: Remarks on Irish Fibulae (Trans. British Arch. Assoc., Gloucester Congress, 1848), p.91 and PL.5.
4. J. C. Robinson (ed.): Catalogue of the Special Exhibition of Works of Art of the Mediaeval, Renaissance and more recent periods, on loan to the South Kensington Museum, June 1862 (London 1863), 44, No. 876.
5. Armstrong, op. cit., n. 1, PL. XXVII.
6. Descriptions of this work are based on notes in the files of the National Museum of Ireland.

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7. M. Ryan (ed.): Treasures of Ireland, (Dublin 1983), Nos. 51d and 51e.
8. H. Hencken: Cahercommaun: A Stone Fort in County Clare. (R.S.A.I., Extra Volume, Dublin 1938), pp. 27-30 and figs. 11-12.
9. Ryan op. cit., n.7, No. 63.
10. O.S. Johansen· Bossed Penannular Brooches, Acta Archaeologica, 44 (1973); fig. 30 illustrates the ring only. It bears the number '22', and nothing is known of its history. The matching pin was acquired in 1939 and was stated to have been found in one of the crannogs near Strokestown, Co. Roscommon; but this provenance is questionable.
11. E. Wamers: Insularer Metallschmuck in wikingerzeitlichen Gräbern Nordeuropas (Neumünster 1985), PL. 30, 4.
12. R. McAdam: African and Irish Fibulae. (Ulster Jour. Archaeol., 5, 1857), p. 248 and fig. 8.
13. S. Youngs, op. cit., n.1, No. 94.
14. Jour. R.S.A.I., 13 (1874-5), p.158 and Plate.
15. Wamers, op. cit., n.11, PL. 35,1 and 3.
16. R. Ó Floinn in Youngs, op. cit., n.1, No. 77.
17. Ibid., No. 95.
18. J. Boe: Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland. Part III, Norse Antiquities in Ireland (Oslo 1940), p.41, No. 2424 (Islandbridge). The unprovenanced brooch pin is in the National Museum of Ireland (Reg. No. 1906:89). Two further brooch-pins, one from Ireland and the other from Ferkingstad in Norway, are related; but they have circular terminals with concave-sided lozenge settings, which distinguish them as a separate sub-group. See J. Graham-Campbell: "Western Pennannular Brooches and Their Viking Age Copies in Norway: a new classification", pp. 235-6, and Figs. 4 and 5, in Proceedings of the Tenth Viking Congress, Larkollen, Norway, 1985 (Oslo 1987).
19. See especially J. Graham-Campbell: Two Groups of Ninth-Century Brooches, Jour. R.S.A.I., 102 (1972), pp. 115-7, and M. Ryan: The Roscrea Brooch, Éile, 1 (1982), pp. 21-3.
20. Graham-Campbell, op. cit., n.19.
21. Johansen, op. cit., n.10, 93; Graham-Campbell, op. cit., n.19.
22. E. Hogan, Onomasticon Goedelicum, (Dublin and London 1910), p.506, under Luachmagh; C. Plummer, Lives of Irish Saints, Vol. II (Oxford 1922), pp. 117 & 378.
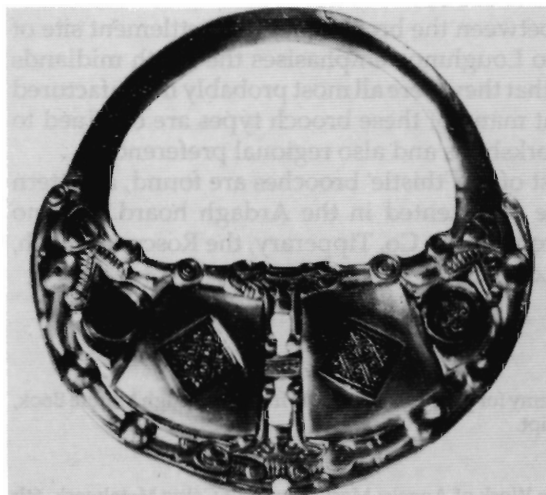23. F. J. Byrne: Irish Kings and High Kings (Dublin, 1973), p.278, No. 16a.

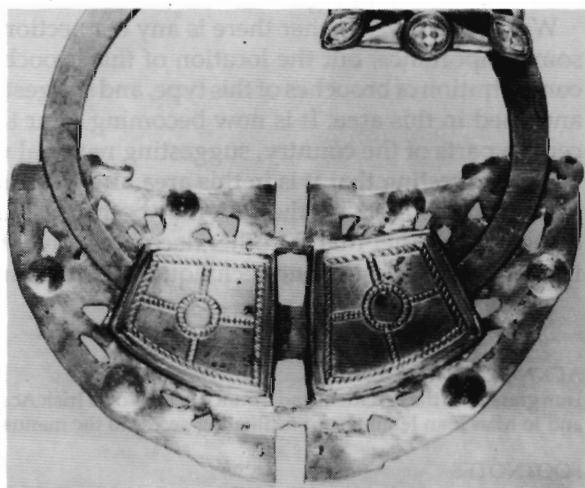FIG 3: Ring of silver brooch. Findplace uncertain but possibly from near Strokestown, Co. Roscommon.

FIG 4: Silver brooch, detail of back. Ardagh, Co. Limerick (1874:101).