

Editorial, 1980

North Munster has done it again! In 1868 it produced the magnificent hoard from Ardagh, Co. Limerick—with its superb chalice, four first-quality brooches and a plain bronze chalice—and a hundred and twelve years later, early in 1980, it produced from Derrynaflan, Co. Tipperary, Ireland's finest hoard of ecclesiastical objects—with its chalice, paten, paten-stand, ladle-like strainer and plain bronze basin. With these two hoards, North Munster can truly claim to lead the world in ecclesiastical art-metalwork.

We are singularly privileged to have in this number of our *Journal*, that for the year of its discovery, a preliminary yet major publication of the Derrynaflan Hoard, written by Michael Ryan, Keeper of Irish Antiquities in the National Museum of Ireland, a member of our Society and the person who is at present engaged in providing the full and complete detailed record of the find.

The circumstances of the discovery of the Derrynaflan Hoard were fortuitous but unfortunate. It was found by a treasure-hunter using a metal detector on another person's land, something which raises the question of legality and other problems. While this may not be the place to go into the vexed question of the rights and wrongs of metal detector-users, it should be pointed out that far too many sites of historical and archaeological interest have been seriously damaged, often virtually destroyed scientifically, by such treasure-hunters. Such people are robbing us of our heritage by their activities on our ancient monuments. Although it may be very tempting for an enthusiast with a metal detector to run it over an ancient earthwork or an old monastery or castle, such activity should not only be discouraged but definitely prohibited—by the land-owners if the law cannot do it. From an archaeological viewpoint such treasure-hunting is not only damaging to the site but is generally virtually useless, no matter what may be found. While the value of the Derrynaflan discovery is immense, the unscientific removal of the objects created problems of interpretation not only as to the re-placing of some of the loose fragments on the objects, but also as regards the date of the hoard's deposition. Such activity can perhaps be compared with that of a diviner hunting for a cancer in a sick person with the sole aid of a pendulum, a carving-knife and a spoon, and the damage can be commensurate! It is perhaps worth quoting the comments of the editors of one responsible archaeological publication at the time:

The recent and much-publicised Derrynaflan find is, despite its archaeological interest, an acute embarrassment to archaeologists and government alike. The find was made with the aid of a metal detector, and the finder is guilty of an offence under the National Monuments Act; the fact that it was later reported to the National Museum of Ireland is of little consequence... If the finder is paid a reward for this lawbreaking it will be a disgrace; the wronged landowner should instead be paid suitable compensation. Anything else will be a capitulation to vandalism... The editors, at least, would rather have seen the Derrynaflan hoard melted down for bullion, or not found at all, than have it found by a "treasure hunter".

—*Irish Archaeological Forum*, 5(1978), i-ii.

While this editor would not agree with the final comment quoted above, he certainly, as a practising, qualified archaeologist, understands the general attitude of the writer. Meanwhile our members are referred to the relevant portions of the National Monuments Act which are published here on page 26, for guidance as to the present position.

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The Society responded with a sense of civic responsibility to the appearance of the City of Limerick Development Plan 1980, and appointed a Sub-Committee, working under the chairmanship of Mr. Brian Geary, to study it, examining it for any serious flaws and omissions, and to see how and if it might be improved. The result has been the production of a major document, published here on pages 85-89, which probably says more about the present state of many of the City's less obvious historic buildings and places, and the danger to them, than much of what has previously been published on the subject. It is a document which officialdom can hardly ignore, one which should not only benefit the City of Limerick and its citizens but also all who appreciate that the heritage of the past is not confined to prehistoric and other ruinous ancient monuments, a document of which our Society can be justly proud.

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Yet again, it is a pleasure to record the Society's grateful thanks to "Shannonside", the Mid-Western Regional Tourism Organisation, for their generous grant-in-aid towards the publication of this *Journal*. We are most grateful to University College, Galway, for a grant towards the publication of "The Round Towers of Ireland—a review article" by Etienne Rynne, a member of its staff.

The Hon. Editor, more than ever, wishes to record his personal thanks to Fr. John D. Leonard, our Hon. Secretary, who helped, virtually as an unofficial Assistant-Editor, with the closing stages of the *Journal's* production, and also to Miss Angela Gallagher who assisted greatly with many of the text-figures.