

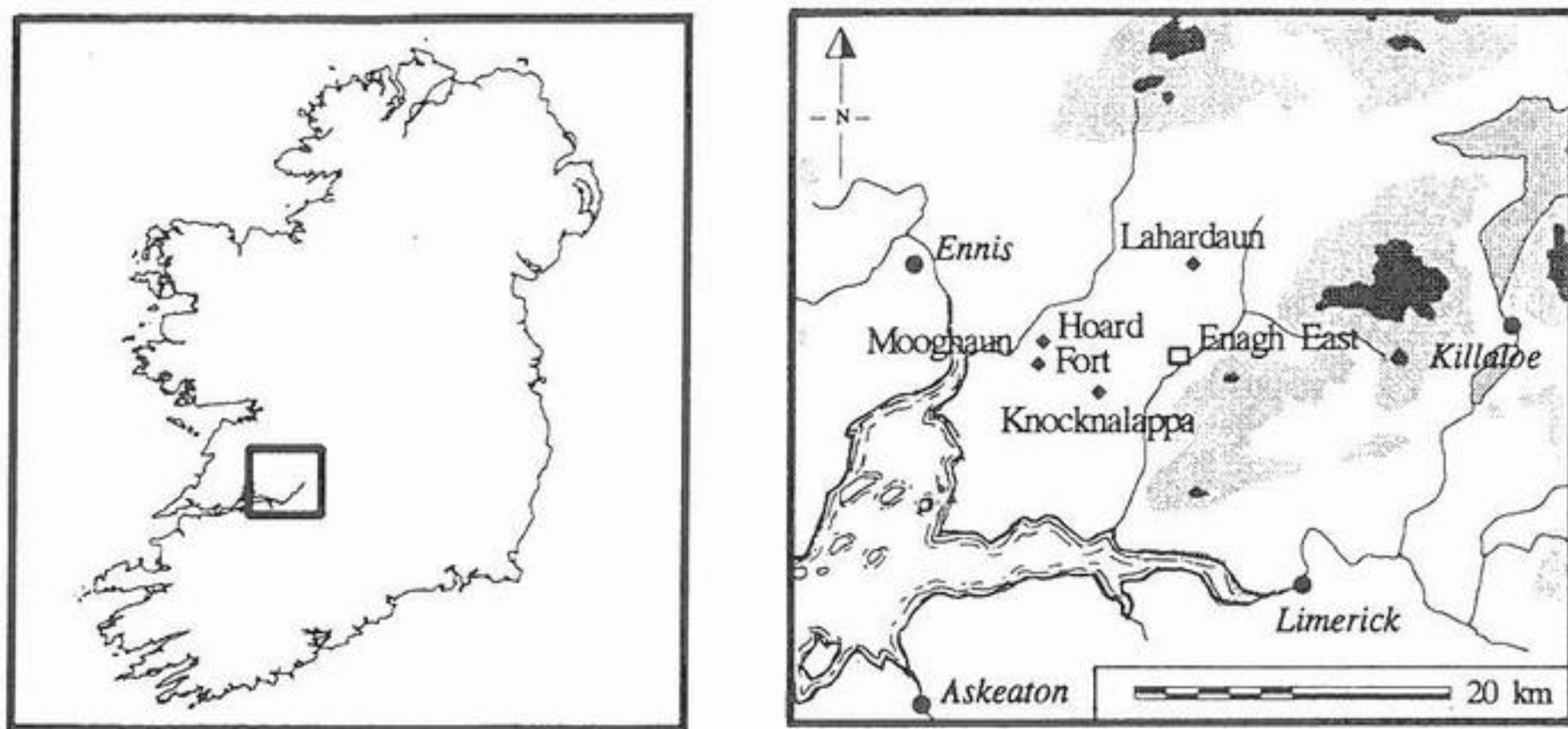
# A Late Bronze Age Hoard From Enagh East, Co. Clare

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*A small bronze tool hoard found by metal detecting in the townland of Enagh East, near Kilkishen, Co. Clare, is described. A brief discussion of the possible reasons for the presence of the bronzes in this location, votive deposition, loss or concealment, is given, taking into account the character, condition and location of the hoard, together with reference to the current understanding of settlement in the area in the later prehistoric period.*

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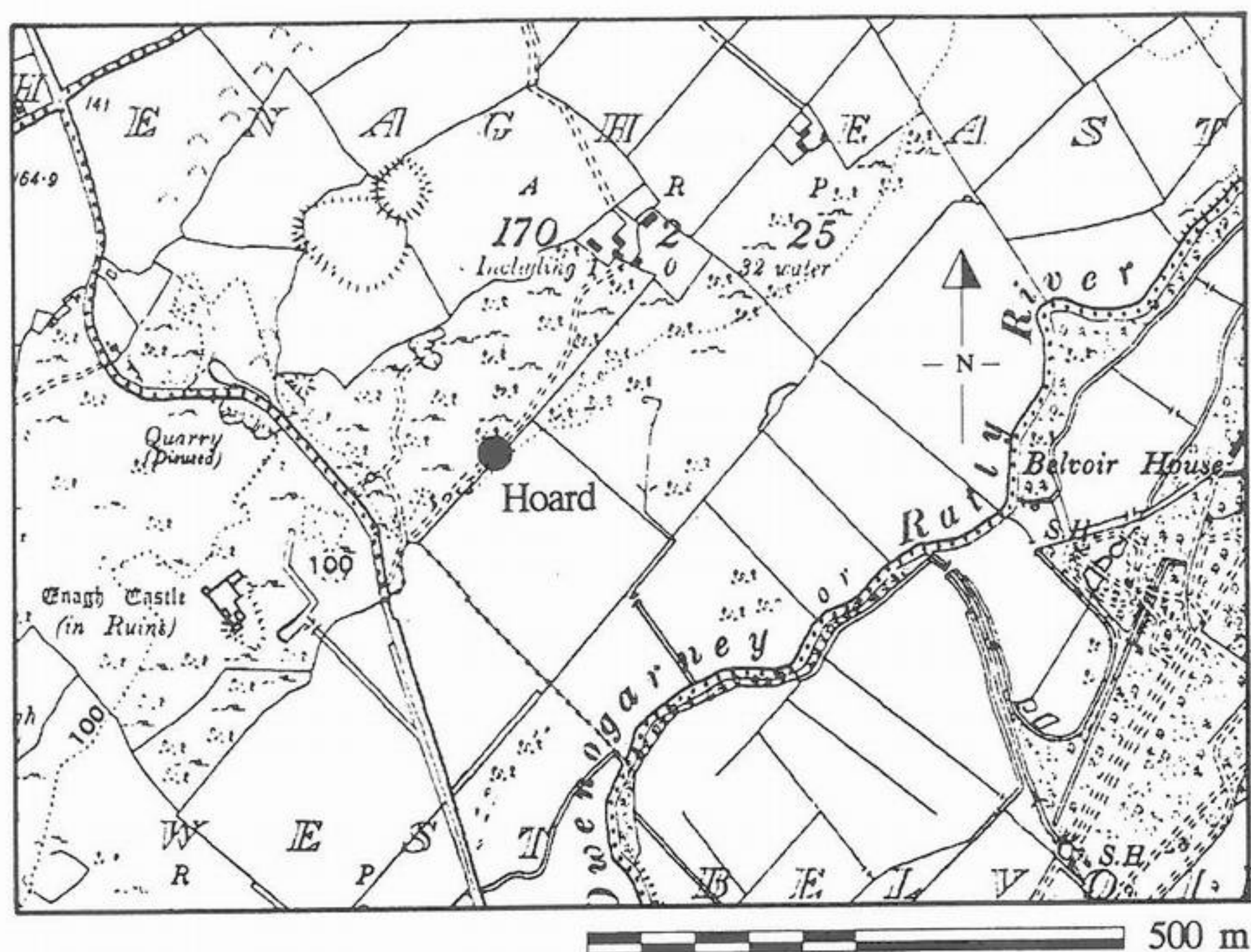
In Spring 1987 while using metal detectors Mr. Patrick Cunneen and a companion found a group of bronze objects at the edge of an old farm trackway at Enagh East, near Kilkishen, Co. Clare, O.S. 6 inch sheet 43; NGR 149960 170881 (*Illus. 1 and 2*). The find was reported to the National Museum of Ireland and inspected by one of us (MR) on 24th July, 1987. The findspot is on a terrace above the Owenogarney River and below a hilltop which has a large earthwork enclosure sited on it. At that time the trackway surface consisted of a layer of mud up to 30cm in thickness overlying a sub-layer of stony material. The track was in frequent use by cattle and its surface subject to regular churning. A stone wall borders the track on its south-eastern side. The find was made in the margin between the wall and the edge of the trackway. Eleven objects were found, all in an area described by the finder as about "a couple of square feet", about 1 metre from the wall on the south-east boundary of the track, with the



Illus. 1. Maps showing location of Enagh East, Co. Clare

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Illus. 2. Map of Enagh East, Co. Clare, showing find-spot of Late Bronze Age hoard

exception of two fragments of the blade of the socketed knife. These were found in the mud at a distance of about 6m (c. 20 feet) from the rest of the find.

There was no evidence at the findspot of digging or disturbance except the churning of the surface and no indication of any ancient structure nearby. The track evidently served the 19th century farm buildings to the north-east and for part of its length, south-west of the findspot, also provided access to a now disused quarry. The level of the track seems to have been lowered over time by erosion through use. Whether the present trackway is a successor to a more ancient one cannot be demonstrated. It seems that the objects were deposited in antiquity and as the surface of the track eroded in the recent past, two of the blade fragments of the socketed knife were moved. There can be little doubt that the blade fragments should be treated as associated with the other objects. It seems reasonable to regard the objects as forming a hoard and the typological evidence of the pieces found supports this view.

The hoard consists of eleven bronze objects: three socketed axeheads, one socketed knife, one socketed gouge, one socketed chisel, one tanged chisel and four solid rings (*Illus. 3*). Surface corrosion is evident on all, and eight of the objects are damaged, one axehead, the gouge and the socketed chisel being the three undamaged objects. The knife is incomplete. The objects are described below by type. The numbers refer to those in the illustration and the National Museum registration number follows.



## THE HOARD

### Axeheads

No. 1 (NMI 1987:161). Circular mouth with an outwardly bevelled rim. A plain raised collar 1.4cm wide runs from the rim to the top of the loop which is broken. The body is decagonal in section, the facets are widest on the broad faces. The cutting-edge is moderately expanded, blunt and chipped, most worn below the loop. A short casting rib<sup>1</sup> extends up each side of the socket. The casting seams were trimmed and polished. The surface is green and brown with some corrosion and was partly cleaned by the finders.

L. 8.8cm; W. (mouth) 3.0 x 2.95cm, W. (cutting edge) 5.15cm.

No. 2 (NMI 1987:160). Rounded oval mouth with an outwardly bevelled rim, poorly finished. A plain raised collar 1.7cm long forms the neck with the loop set at its base. The body is flattened oval in section with four faint narrow facets, one each side of each broad face, and splays gently from neck to the cutting-edge which is worn, especially below the loop. There is a short casting rib on each face of the socket. The casting seams were trimmed but not polished. The surface is bright green, most of it corroded but showing traces of a smooth patina.

L. 7.6cm; W. (mouth) 3.7 x 3.4cm; W. (cutting-edge) 5.05cm.

No. 3 (NMI 1987:162). Oval mouth with a broad, bevelled rim above a plain neck. A heavy loop with ridges running onto the body starts a little below the rim. The body is oval in section, splaying from below the loop to the well expanded deeply curved cutting-edge. This is worn and blunted, slightly chipped below the loop. A medium casting rib is present on both faces of the socket and the casting seams were trimmed. This axehead was broken in two above the blade prior to deposition. The surface is corroded, now a mottled pale green with a stain on the broad face above and below the break, but not on the same faces.

L. 10.2cm; W. (mouth) 5.7 x 4.1cm; W. (cutting-edge) 7.5cm.

### Chisels

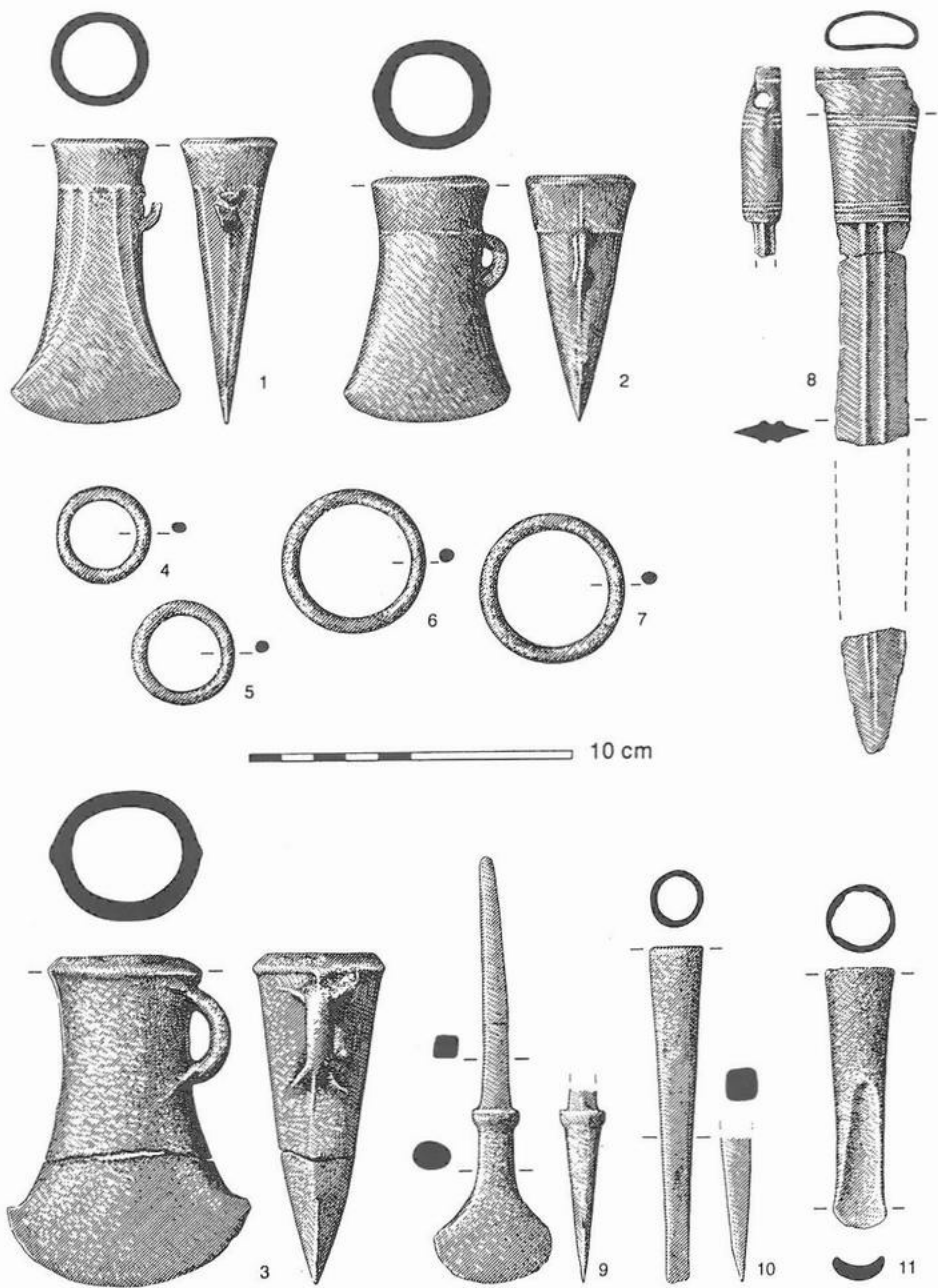
No. 9 (NMI 1987:165). Tanged chisel with expanded blade. The tang is square in cross section. A rounded collar separates it from the blade shank which is oval in section. The blade flares outwards, the cutting-edge is deeply curved and is chipped along its length, most worn to one side. The casting seams were trimmed and polished. The surface is corroded, mottled green. The tang is broken in two, and the break is patinated.

L. 13.1cm; L (of tang) 7.8cm; W. (of blade at cutting-edge) 3.62cm.

No. 10 (NMI 1987:164). Socketed chisel. The mouth is round with a narrow bevelled rim.

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<sup>1</sup>The term casting rib is used to denote the ribs seen in the sockets of socketed axeheads, sometimes in gouges and other small tools also, extending from the base up the centre of each broad face for varying distances. Frequently, more than one rib occurs on each face. In some the ribs are decoratively arranged, for example two may converge onto a centre one. Their significance has been discussed most recently by Prof. E. Rynne (1983, pp. 48-49). He demonstrated that they could be reproduced by the insertion of wax strips into grooves cut into the core, in order to temporarily retain the core free-standing in the mould during casting, and regarded them in effect as core prints. Since they do not occur on one of the earliest forms of socketed axehead in Ireland, Eogan's Class 2 (Eogan forthcoming), it is more likely that they are a refinement of the casting procedure. The cores were probably held in place by the gate step as in the examples from Dalkey Island, (see Liversage 1968, Fig. 7 and fig. 20:2543a) and Dún Aonghasa (O'Carroll in *Discovery Programme Reports 2*, forthcoming), and the grooves cut in the core to aid the even spread of metal between the core and the valves and to ensure that no gaps in the wall or other weaknesses occurred.



Illus. 3. Late Bronze Age hoard, Enagh East, Co. Clare.



The cross-section of the body becomes rectangular 2.5cm below the mouth and the chisel is evenly tapered from the mouth to the cutting edge. One blade face is bevelled 1.1cm from the cutting edge which is damaged on one side. Slight traces of trimmed and polished casting seams remain. The surface is corroded in places, pale green in colour with bronze showing where recently it has been scraped. The socket is 5.0cm in depth and is circular in section throughout.

L. 10.3cm; W. (mouth) 1.7cm; W. (cutting-edge) 7mm.

### **Gouge**

No. 11 (NMI 1987: 163). Socketed with a round plain mouth and a flat chipped rim. The body tapers to just above the cutting-edge which is slightly expanded, curved and blunt. It is worn asymmetrically. The hollowing of the blade begins 3.5cm from the mouth. A short faint casting rib is visible. The casting seams were trimmed and polished. The surface is mottled pale green, corroded in places.

L. 8.5cm; W (mouth) 2.14cm; W (cutting-edge) 1.7cm.

### **Knife**

No. 8 (NMI 1987:166) Incomplete. Socketed knife with an oval mouth which is damaged. Two rivet-holes are set in the broad axis of the socket, both are now distorted. Two closely spaced grooves are around the mouth immediately below the rim, three closely spaced grooves are 1.5cm below the mouth and three more grooves are at the base of the socket which is 4.8cm long. The base of the socket is flat where it meets the blade. This has a narrow bevel at each side and two pronounced parallel ribs down the centre. The edges are badly chipped and the point is damaged. A large part of the lower portion of the blade is missing. The surface is pitted all over, with one face of the socket more heavily corroded than the other.

Estimated original length 21cm; W. (blade max) 2.1cm.

### **Rings**

Nos. 4-7 (NMI 1987: 167-170). Four solid rings. They appear to form two groups as the two larger rings are 4.55cm and 4.45cm in external diameter respectively and the remaining two are 3.2cm and 3.0cm in external diameter. All have an oval cross-section and are 4mm thick in all cases. All are buckled. The surface is pitted on all four and is a mottled pale green in colour.

## **DISCUSSION**

The objects in this hoard have clear parallels in other hoards in the Dowris Phase of the Late Bronze Age in Ireland. The three axeheads, though different from each other, all belong roughly within the same period of manufacture and use, and all have parallels in the eponymous find for the period, that from Dowris in Co. Offaly (Eogan 1983, no. 119, figs. 69-70). In Eogan's corpus study (forthcoming) the three axeheads belong to three identifiable types, all common in Ireland. Two are of insular form but axehead No. 1 (NMI 1987:161), the slender faceted example, is of a form known also from Britain, especially the south, and western France, the Low Countries and Northern Europe. Its place of ultimate origin may be in north-west France, though Schmidt and Burgess (1981, pp. 204-11) believed that it was in southern England. This form of axehead occurs in association with Late Bronze Age material in Britain, but prior to the recovery of the Enagh East hoard the only two other Irish hoards with these axeheads also contained in one case a socket-looped spearhead (Ballinliss, Co.



Armagh, Eogan 1983, no. 43, fig. 21A), and in the other (Kish, Co. Wicklow, Eogan 1983, no. 155, fig. 96) a basal-looped spearhead, as well as a socketed knife of Thorndon type and a second axehead, similar to no. 2 from the Enagh East hoard. Both spearhead forms in these hoards are of Middle Bronze Age date, though the basal-looped form is slightly later (O'Carroll 1986). A date this early for these axeheads is not supported by the British evidence, so their position within the later Bronze Age in Ireland is not yet clearly understood. The relatively small number of slender faceted axeheads in Ireland - less than one hundred - make it plausible that they may have been regarded as exotic, and copied from foreign examples. While axeheads of similar form to no. 2, broad with facets at the junctions of the sides and faces, are regarded as being Irish in origin and Dowris Phase in date, similar examples in northern Britain are dated by Schmidt and Burgess (1981, pp. 191-7) to early in the Ewart's Park/Carp's Tongue Phase. This, coupled with the associations in the Kish, Co. Wicklow hoard may support an earlier rather than later date in the Dowris Phase for them.

The origin of tanged chisels is thought to lie in a development of the trunnion chisel, an object with an unexpanded blade, tang and lugs separating the tang from the blade (Hodges 1956, p. 41). This form had a long use-life and is known from Ireland, Britain and the Continent. Raftery (1942a, p. 128) saw chisels with a waisted blade such as this example as an Irish development. Eogan (1964, p. 298) divides them into Class 1 with a kite-shaped blade and Class 2 with a waisted blade. Class 2 forms are apparently unknown in contemporary contexts outside Ireland. However, Raftery makes the point that he would rather not refer to these tanged objects as chisels, seeing them instead as knives for cutting soft material such as leather. O'Connor (1980, pp. 134 and 175) came to the same conclusion. The socketed chisel is a tool type well known from Central Europe and the Irish examples are thought to have derived from these via Britain (Eogan 1964, p. 298).

Socketed gouges are a tool type which likewise had a long life and widespread distribution. Eogan (1966, pp. 97 and 99) suggests that they are found in the Caucasian region by the latter part of the 2nd millennium B.C. Socketed chisels, hammers and axeheads are known in Ireland from the Bishopsland Hoard (Eogan 1983, no. 16, fig. 10), and the development of a socketed gouge at this stage is very probable.

Hodges divided the Irish socketed knives into four groups. The knife, no. 8, is of his Thorndon type (Hodges 1956, p. 36). The type is characterised by parallel sided blades, though occasionally they are slightly leaf-shaped, and have oval, or more rarely hexagonal or octagonal sectioned sockets. The junction of the blade and socket is a straight line, and the socket for the handle may be straight-sided or may expand towards the hilt. Eogan (1964, p. 296) agreed with this classification and added that knives of this form are fairly common throughout Britain, occurring also in western France while at least two examples are known from northern Germany. The decorative motif on the socket is not unusual, though it is unusual to have decoration in the middle, as is the case in the Enagh East example. The cross-section of the knife blade is also more elaborate than in the majority of known examples (A. Halmschlag, *pers. comm.*).

Rings are generally assumed to be part of some sort of fastening either of horse-trappings or belt-fastenings or attachments to belts or straps for carrying things. Thus a bag may have been closed or attached to a belt or strap by such means, much as rings are used nowadays to fasten leather or cloth straps. Equally they may have been part of the harness attachments where a horse or other beast may have been used either for traction or as a pack animal.

The condition of the blades of all the objects suggest that they were worn through use, despite the state of preservation. While allowances must be made for the possibility of abrasion caused by traffic on the trackway, all the axeheads have asymmetrical blades and are



most worn below the loop. This is common in socketed axeheads, as the objects would have been hafted with the loop on the same side as the haft and a thong through the loop would help fasten the axehead to the haft, thus the part of the cutting-edge beneath it would be the first in contact with the wood, and most subject to wear. Both the gouge and the tanged chisel are worn asymmetrically also. It seems reasonable to assume that the objects all had been used and were still capable, in the case of the unbroken pieces, of further use.

Over two hundred hoards or possible hoards of the Irish Later Bronze Age have been documented by Eogan (1983) and a number of further examples, of which this is one, have been found since that work was published. Hoards are well documented throughout European prehistory, but the greatest number occur during the Bronze Age. Objects which occur in hoards are usually classified as weapons (swords and spears), ornaments (bracelets, neckrings, goldwork and pins), tools (axeheads, chisels, gouges, knives, sickles, hammers and anvils) and rings. Using this breakdown of types it can be seen that only eight hoards of the total known to date from the Later Bronze Age in Ireland contain three or more tool types as is the case with the Enagh East hoard, although tools have been found in at least forty eight hoards. Of these eight hoards only one, that from Ballinderry Bog, Co. Westmeath (Eogan 1983, no. 146, fig. 92) has the same tool types as the Enagh East find, though the Ballinderry chisel is looped as well as tanged. That hoard also contains rings but of a different form, being larger and cast around a core. The hoard from Bootown, Co. Antrim (Eogan 1983, no. 35, fig. 17), contains a socketed axehead, socketed gouge, tanged chisel, leaf-shaped spearhead and four small rings similar to those in the Enagh East hoard. It also contains a large ring with a smaller ring threaded on to it. A hoard from Knockmaon, Co. Waterford (Eogan 1983, no. 144, fig. 91) contains two socketed axeheads, two tanged chisels, a socketed gouge, a Thorndon type knife as well as a knife with a curved blade, and a cut-down sword. Such small hoards may have been the tool-kits of individuals who practiced in a number of allied crafts, most obviously wood and leather-working, to produce objects such as bowls, bags and other domestic equipment.

Hoards are generally understood to be collections of objects deposited together in a sealed context, and the manner of deposition and the presumed variety of reasons behind the practice have been explained in both functional and ritual terms. Thus deposits in bogs, lakes and rivers are commonly thought of as ritual, though accidental loss is more usually invoked in the case of single finds from the same contexts. Where it would have been easier to retrieve the objects, as from a dryland site, then concealment or storage may have been intended. While the internal evidence of the hoard may suggest a particular kind of interpretation, such as the presumably ritual deposition of horns in bogs (Coles 1963), most, like the Enagh East find, lend themselves to a number of explanations. A recent study of the phenomenon of hoards in southern Britain (Taylor 1993) has focused on the condition of the objects deposited, in relation to types and then to location. He accepts, as does Bradley (1990), that much of the metalwork deposited is done so as a public act of competitive consumption, with status accruing to those who could afford to dispose of the most costly items, either in terms of the actual value of the artifacts themselves, or the quantity of metal removed permanently from the system. From his study, Taylor (1993, 102-103) has been able to show that tool hoards increased in numbers towards the end of the Bronze Age, but that the objects often exhibited a high degree of wear, thus indicating that they had been in circulation for a long time before deposition. He concludes that by this time, deposition of metal of any condition, including scrap, was as valid a means of gaining prestige as the deposition of prestige items such as weaponry had been formerly. But the more mundane interpretations centring on explanations such as concealment or collection for recycling cannot be discounted.



Eogan (1983, p. 8) has shown that in the Late Bronze Age wetland findspots considerably outnumber dryland for hoards with a known provenance. Six hoards with a known findspot have a similar range of tool types to this hoard from Enagh East, and of these only one from Ross, Co. Tipperary, came from a dryland site, the remainder being from bogs. That being said, an analysis of hoards containing tools only, and tools and other types, shows that the findplaces are evenly divided between wetland and dryland sites. Dryland sites predominate (by five to four) for hoards with rings and one other type. It is interesting that the distribution of hoards in North Munster is clustered and apparently non-random. Taking this into account perhaps we should consider not only the context of deposition but also that the occurrences of hoards reflect patterns of behaviour traceable in terms of social territories. The preferences for a particular environment may have been less structured than we think, but the right to make votive depositions may have been restricted to certain people living in certain territories.

Although there are indications that items in the hoard were broken prior to deposition (two of the axeheads and the socketed knife) and thus that they may have been collected for recycling, the range of objects gives the impression that it is a personal tool-kit. Deliberate breakage of objects intended as offerings is well documented at sites such as Flag Fen, in the fenlands of East Anglia (Coombs 1992) and introduces a further element into the interpretation of the Enagh East find. This tool-kit hoard could fit in with any of the following concept: votive deposition, perhaps an offering from a craftsman, accidental loss, or concealment for safe-keeping. The coherent nature of the find and the condition of the artifacts could suggest personal property ritually broken and then deposited, or the concealment of artifacts, some to be re-cycled, and then never recovered. Accidental loss is the least likely explanation as it presupposes that the items were carried in a bag or tied on a thong, dropped on dryland and never recovered, eventually being covered by a depth of soil.

The Enagh East hoard was found in an area in which later prehistoric material is well represented. Three other hoards or assemblages were found within a 10 km radius, as well as a number of single finds of similar date. In fact this later prehistoric material occurs in a band running roughly from the west to the east, from the top of the Fergus estuary to the Broadford Gap, and possibly south of this to the Cratloe hills (see Grogan *et al.*, forthcoming). The gold hoard from Mooghaun North, "the Great Clare Find", was found 9 km to the west (Armstrong 1917, pp. 14-20), and is of such an extraordinary character that it must have been the treasury of either some individual or group whose power was not confined to the immediate locality, or perhaps was the reserve of some groups whose wealth was based on control of trade. Excavation at the lakeside platform at Knocknalappa (Raftery 1942b), 6 km to the south-west of Enagh East, showed that considerable domestic activity was represented by the pottery (over two hundred sherds), bone and stone artifacts, some bronzes (a sunflower pin, bead and strip) and amber, which had been incorporated into the structural layers. But there was no habitation or dating evidence from the platform itself (Raftery 1942b). A sword, a gouge and a stone axehead were found on the foreshore. The impression given is that the site was the property of a wealthy family who had buried some of their valuables for safe-keeping near their dwelling. A similar scenario may be the best explanation for the presence of a hoard close to the lakeshore site at Rathinaun, Co. Sligo (Eogan 1983, no. 132, fig. 84) The hoard from Lahardaun (Coffey 1906, p. 134) was found 6 km to the north-north-east. As well as a very fine sunflower pin it contains two socketed axeheads and two bracelets. For the region, in common with the rest of the country, the artifactual evidence is the principal source of information for the Later Bronze Age. However, there are a number of monuments possibly of similar date in the vicinity of the findspot of this hoard. The hillfort at Mooghaun



South, currently under excavation by the North Munster Project (one of the 'Discovery Programme' projects), has already yielded one radiocarbon date which calibrates to around 1100 B.C. (Grogan, forthcoming). Excavations at Aughinish, near Foynes, and at Lough Gur, both in Co. Limerick (Kelly 1974; Cleary 1994), and also at Ballyveelish and Curraghatoor, both in Co. Tipperary (Doody 1987a; 1987b), provide us with the closest known definite habitation sites which can be said to be roughly contemporary with this hoard, but this is simply indicative of what has been found to date and cannot be taken to indicate an absence of later prehistoric settlement in the Enagh East area. Further research should increase our knowledge of the context of this and other Late Bronze Age hoards.

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