

Some Unrecorded Bronze Age Gold Ornaments from Co. Limerick

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Antiquarian sources are an invaluable source of information on archaeological objects which have lost their provenance or which are unrecorded. An examination of a variety of archival records in a number of public collections has added considerably to the number of gold ornaments known from Co. Limerick.

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This paper presents a number of previously unpublished objects of Bronze Age goldwork from Co. Limerick which have been identified from archival sources. It also includes a note on a hoard of bronzes and an appendix listing all known Bronze Age goldwork from Co. Limerick. This list draws from the principal sources of information for Bronze Age goldwork from Ireland¹ and also incorporates material which has been recently published². It includes objects in media other than gold to which gold has been applied either as a decorative covering or inlay. The list adds considerably to the last published list of gold³ from Co. Limerick.

The unpublished objects which are described here include descriptions and sketches of a gold dress-fastener, a hoard of gold objects and the terminal of a large gold dress-fastener, all of which were found in the late eighteenth century. The source of the information is a series of letters written by Ralph Ousley, the well-known antiquarian and collector⁴. They are contained in a volume of correspondence (National Library of Ireland Ms. 1415) which contains letters to several persons including Charles Vallancey, William Burton Conyngnam and Lord Carlow, from a number of correspondents including Gabriel Beranger, Charles O'Connor, Francis Ledwich and Ralph Ousley. The correspondence is mostly concerned with antiquarian matters relating to the recording and illustration of monuments⁵. It is worth noting at this point that the most prominent of Limerick collectors, Lord Dunraven, whose collection contained several important pieces of Bronze Age gold including two lunulae, does not seem to have had any gold ornaments which can be provenanced to Co. Limerick.

*National Museum of Ireland.

¹E.C.R. Armstrong, *Catalogue of Irish Gold Ornaments in the Collection of the Royal Irish Academy*, Dublin 1920; J.J. Taylor, *Bronze Age Goldwork of the British Isles*, Cambridge 1980; W.R. Wilde, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Antiquities of Gold in the Museum of the Roy. Irish Acad.*, Dublin 1862. For Co. Limerick in particular, see George Scott, 'Some Unrecorded Finds of Gold Ornaments from the Counties of Limerick, Clare and Tipperary', *J. of the Limerick Field Club*, 3:10 (1905-8), 27-37.

²M. Cahill, 'Notes on the Re-provenancing of Two Gold Dress-Fasteners from Counties Tipperary and Limerick', *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 33 (1991), 99-100, and M. Cahill, 'Mr. Anthony's Bog Oak Case of Gold Antiquities', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 94C (1994), 53-109.

³Taylor, *op. cit.*, 107-108.

⁴Ralph Ousley, b. 1839, antiquarian and collector, was a member of the Royal Irish Academy who contributed several papers to the Transactions of the Academy on important archaeological discoveries including three Later Bronze Age horns found at Carrigogunnell, Co. Limerick ('An Account of Three Metal trumpets, found in the County of Limerick, in the year 1787', *Trans. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 2 (1788), 3-5). He was married to a Limerick woman and lived at Dunmore, Co. Galway, and in Limerick. In 1790 he was visited by a French scholar and Consul in Ireland, Charles Etienne Coquebert de Montbret, who listed part of Ousley's collection. See S. Ní Chinnéide, 'A Journey from Cork to Limerick in December 1790', *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 14 (1971), 65-74. For an account of the Ousley family see R.J. Kelly, 'The Name and Family of Ousley', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 40 (1910), 132-146.

⁵M. Nevin, 'General Charles Vallancey 1725-1812', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 123 (1993), 19-58.

The person or persons to whom Ralph Ousley addressed his letters is not known. They are addressed to 'Dear Sir' and are quite deferential in tone. However, of the three addressees noted above, none is recognised as a major collector and it would seem to be implied by Ousley (see p. 8) that the person to whom he was writing was already in possession of a considerable collection of antiquities. It may also be noted that Lord Carlow (John Dawson, Earl of Portarlington) was a descendant of John Damer of Shronell, Co. Tipperary, who had in his possession some of the objects found in the Bog of Cullen during the eighteenth century⁶.

New information on the find-place and circumstances of discovery of a hoard of gold ornaments previously ascribed to Kilcommon, Co. Tipperary, but which can now be provenanced to Co. Limerick is also discussed. This material is derived from archival sources in the Ordnance Survey Office and from local sources. Correspondence containing previously unpublished information on a hoard of gold ornaments from near Bruree is also presented. This information is derived from the topographical files of the Irish Antiquities Division of the National Museum of Ireland and local sources.

All manuscripts are reproduced unedited and retain their original spelling, punctuation and syntax.

1. Gold dress-fastener, Co. ?Limerick

NLI Ms. 1415, 185. From Ralph Ousley to an unidentified correspondent.

Limerick Jan.y 6th 1786

Dear Sir,

I am this day informed by a respectable Silver Smith that an acquaintance of his in the country has just found a Golden Antique worth from 30 to 40£ or more, as it weighs near a pound - it is *trumpet mouthed*, but he could not exactly describe it - however I made him send for it and it will be (probably) here in 4 or 5 days. - as you desired me to be on the look out for such affairs, I shall with great pleasure secure it for you if any way curious, or perfect and will send you a drawing of it, when it comes - I dare say it will be had for the base value of the Gold. In this or any other thing in my power I shall be happy in shewing with what true respect, I have the honour to be, Dr Sir your most faithful Obliged and Obed.t Servant

Ralph Ousley

NLI Ms. 1415, 187. From William Ousley

Sir,

I have taken the liberty during my father's absence, of calling at Mr. Fitzgerald's⁷ but he is at present in the country.

⁶See J.N.A. Wallace, 'The Golden Bog of Cullen', *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 1:3 (1938), 89-101.

⁷The marks of three Limerick silversmiths named Fitzgerald are recorded between 1768 and 1800. They are Garret Fitzgerald (1768-1780), Maurice Fitzgerald, about 1784, and William Fitzgerald, about 1800. As Garret Fitzgerald died in 1780 and William Fitzgerald is first mentioned in 1800, it is most probable that the Fitzgerald referred to is Maurice Fitzgerald who was first mentioned in the book of the Goldsmiths' Company in 1760 and last in 1820. Maurice Fitzgerald is also the silversmith referred below at p. 8. See *Jackson's Silver and Gold Marks of England, Scotland and Wales*, Ian Pickford, (ed.), 3rd rev. ed. 1989, pp. 725-726.

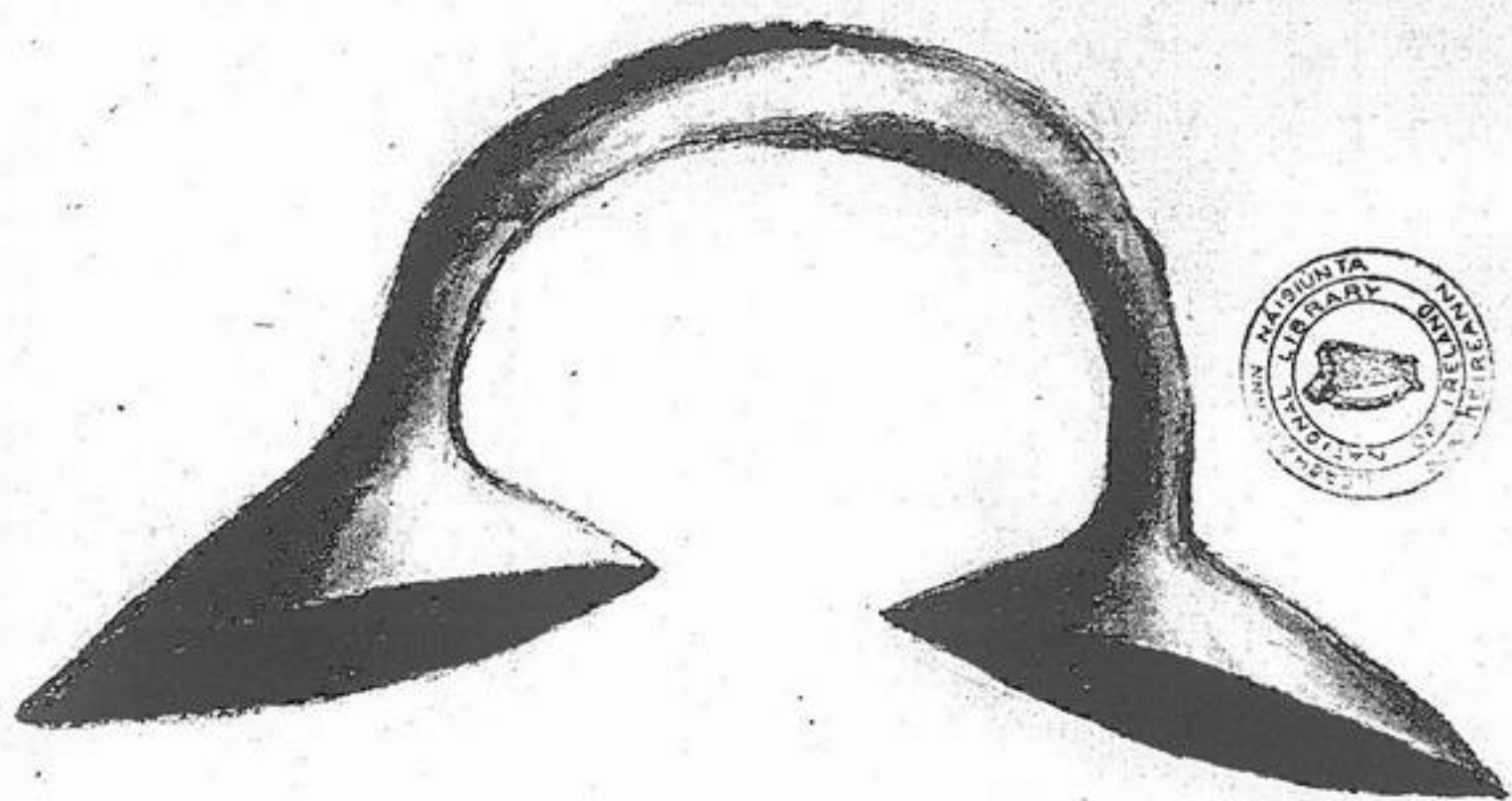
The Gold thing is extremely curious: the Silversmith who has it says it is of the purest Gold - it weighs between 8 and 9 ounces, and I believe will come to about 30 Guineas - I have taken the liberty of enclosing a Sketch, which I took in the shop where it is, and as I had not time to finish it more correctly, I hope, Sir, you will excuse the badness of the Execution - it is of the Same Size as represented in the Sketch -

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your Obedient humble Serv.t
William Ousley

Limerick
Jany. 20th 1786

Comment:

The object described and sketched (Illus. 1) by William Ousley (son of Ralph Ousley) is a large gold-fastener of Later Bronze Age date. The sketch was drawn at life size. The maximum lateral width of the object is 15.0 cm; the diameter of the terminals, which appear to be deeply hollowed, is c. 6.7 cm. The bow or handle appears to be rounded in section. There is nothing on the drawing to suggest that the object was decorated. The weight is recorded as between eight and nine ounces and the value at about 30 guineas or £31.50. This is a substantial weight for an object of this type. At eight ounces this yields a price per ounce of just under £4 which was the normal price for gold at this time.



Illus. 1 Dress-fastener, Co. ?Limerick. (Photo: National Library of Ireland)

It is not possible to say whether or not this object still survives. As the recorded weight is not specific and the object does not appear to have any other uniquely distinguishing features, it would be difficult to identify it with any other similar object in public collections. It is regrettable

that Ousley's correspondent has not yet been identified as that might provide a historical route by which the object might be traced (assuming that it had been acquired by that person).

2. Hoard of 4 gold ornaments and an ingot, Co. ?Limerick

NLI Ms. 1415, 191. Ralph Ousley to an unidentified correspondent.

Limerick March 22nd 1787

Dear Sir,

On my arrival here yesterday, I found 4 of the Gold Antiques (Hooks) and a large Ingot of the purest gold in the possession of Mr. Connell⁸ a Silver.h here - and as I knew you already have a good many of them I would not engage any of them absolutely, but requested he'd keep them for a couple of posts 'till I know your pleasure - underneath are their respective wts and values - the ingot is spoiled by being cut in 2 it was worth £16.0.0. the hooks are in the finest preservation - I have the honour to be with the truest respect, Dr Sir, your most faithful and Obed.t humble Servant

Ralph Ousley

	oz	pwt	grs	£	s	d	
No. 1	1	11	3	6.	4.	6	[Sketch of one 'hook' here]
No. 2	2.	2.	17	8.	10.	10	
No. 3	3.	17.	0	15.	8.	0	
No. 4	3.	10.	11	14.	1.	10	
at 4£ pr. oz				£44.	5.	2	

Comment:

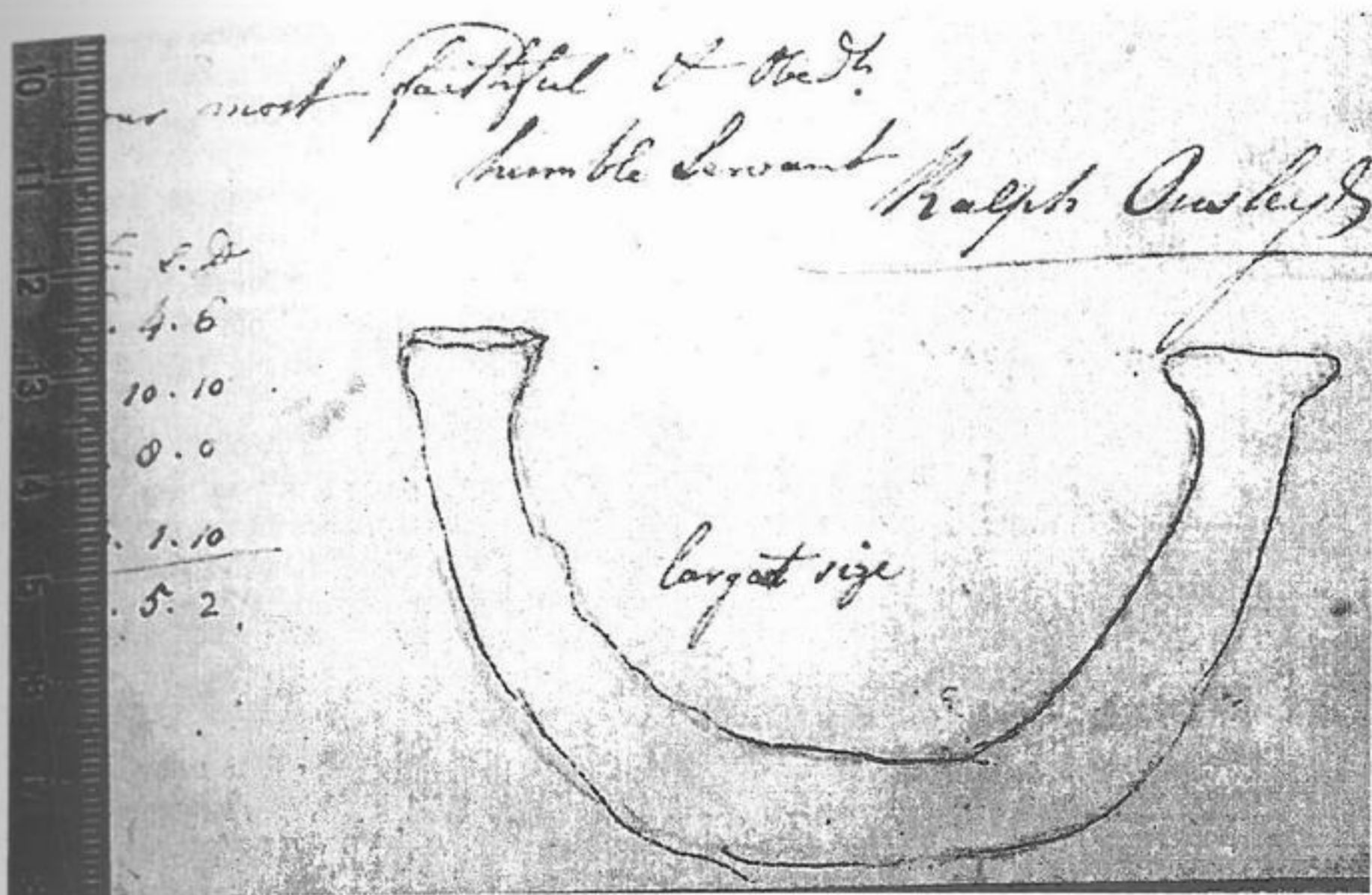
This is an unusual hoard of at least 4 gold ornaments with expanded terminals (Illus. 2) and an ingot⁹. Only one ornament is sketched in the letter and is noted as the largest of the group. It appears to a U-shaped bar with slightly expanded terminals. It is not clear whether the terminals are hollowed or flat. The very broad opening suggests that it is not a bracelet but may be more closely related to dress-fasteners although the terminals are underdeveloped. The sketch drawing appears to have been done at life size. The maximum lateral width is approx. 9.0 cm. The diameter of the terminals is 1.5 – 1.8 cm. It seems that the four objects were of the same type.

There is no description given of the ingot other than it was cut in two and was valued at £16.00, giving a weight of 4 ounces. There are very few references to the discovery of ingots

⁸Patrick Connell is listed in the Dublin Goldsmiths' Company between 1784 and 1788. He is the only Connell listed. Pickford *op. cit.*, pp. 725–727.

⁹Ousley says 'I found four of the Gold Antiques . . . ' perhaps suggesting that there may have been more originally.

¹⁰Apart from those discussed in the text only two other gold ingots survive from Ireland - W.283, an unlocalised small ingot of plano-convex section weighing 19.18 grammes which is closely similar to ingots from Bronze Age hoards from France. C. Eluere, *L'Age du Bronze en France 2 - Les Ors Préhistoriques*, Paris 1982. In the collections of the British Museum is a small tapered ingot (Ireland, no locality; BM 1871.4-1.13) about 2 1/8 inches long and weighing 437 1/2 grains (28.35 grammes) which was purchased from Sir Thomas Tobin of Ballincollig, Co. Cork in 1871.



Illus. 2 Gold Ornament from a Hoard, Co. ?Limerick. (Photo: National Library of Ireland)

of gold from Ireland¹⁰. However, replicas of two tapered ingots from the hoard found at Mooghaun, Co. Clare, survive. An ingot very similar in shape to the smaller of the Mooghaun ingots was found with three rolled up gold bracelets in the socket of a Later Bronze Age axehead at Llanarmon-yn-Ial, Clwyd, Wales¹¹.

The total weight of the hoard is 15 ounces 1 pennyweight and 7 grains (468.6 grammes). It is most unlikely that this hoard or even pieces from it have survived. Ornaments of the type illustrated are not common. If they do survive it should be possible to identify them by reference to the detailed weights which have been recorded.

The discovery of this hoard requires some consideration of another hoard from Co. Limerick which is said to have contained an ingot. This is the group of objects recorded as part of a large hoard from Askeaton. A small ingot of 14 pennyweight (21.77 grammes), a pair of lock-rings, a gold bracelet and reputedly, a large quantity of other gold ornaments are said to have been found also. The lock-rings were in the possession of Lord Inchiquin but have not been seen in modern times. The bracelet was in the possession of the Wallace family, the well known Limerick jewellers. In 1948, Mr. J.N.A. Wallace informed Dr. Joseph Raftery, then Keeper of Irish Antiquities at the National Museum of Ireland, that the bracelet was in the possession of and was worn by his wife. Its present whereabouts is not known. However, the source of the information regarding the size of the Askeaton hoard is not entirely reliable and no date or find circumstances have been recorded (see below).

Also of great interest in this regard is a letter recently discovered in the archives of the National Museum. It is addressed to E.C.R. Armstrong from T.J.W. (*i.e.* T.J. Westropp). The letter quotes from a letter sent to Westropp by J.N.A. Wallace.

¹¹H. Stephen Green, 'A Late Bronze Age Gold Hoard from Llanarmon-yn-Ial, Clwyd', *Antiqs. J.*, 63 (1983), 384-387.

Kilcornan,
Oranmore.
Sep. 11th 1917

My dear Armstrong,
CLARE GOLD FIND

Mr. Wallace of Landsdowne Terrace Limerick writes that the ornaments (Fig. 3, p. 31)¹² "were found at Askeaton, Co. Limerick with a bangle and a gold ingot and are illustrated and described in the Limerick Field Club Journal (Vol. III, No. 10, p. 27) in a paper by George Scott".

"The so-called 'bucket of gold' was *not* brought to my father in fact I never heard of it until now. The story of the man losing half his ornaments and their subsequent recovery is correct but all this happened in my grandfather's time. I never heard the story in connection with the Askeaton ornaments. As to the gold crown of 10 or 12 points this is also a myth. In the Field Club Journal (as cited above) you will find the truth as far as we could find it about this crown or helmet [see also Appendix, p. 21, fn. 31].

"My father never melted any gold ornaments nor were any melted while he was in business which he entered about 1866.

"Mr. Moore (who had been employed by my grandfather for many years) had part of the Clare find and settled in Belfast. A short time ago a lady from Co. Clare let me see a very heavy gold bangle which she stated her husband bought from Mr. Moore in Belfast many years ago and that he stated it was part of the Clare find".¹³

J N Wallace

Yours ever T.J.W.

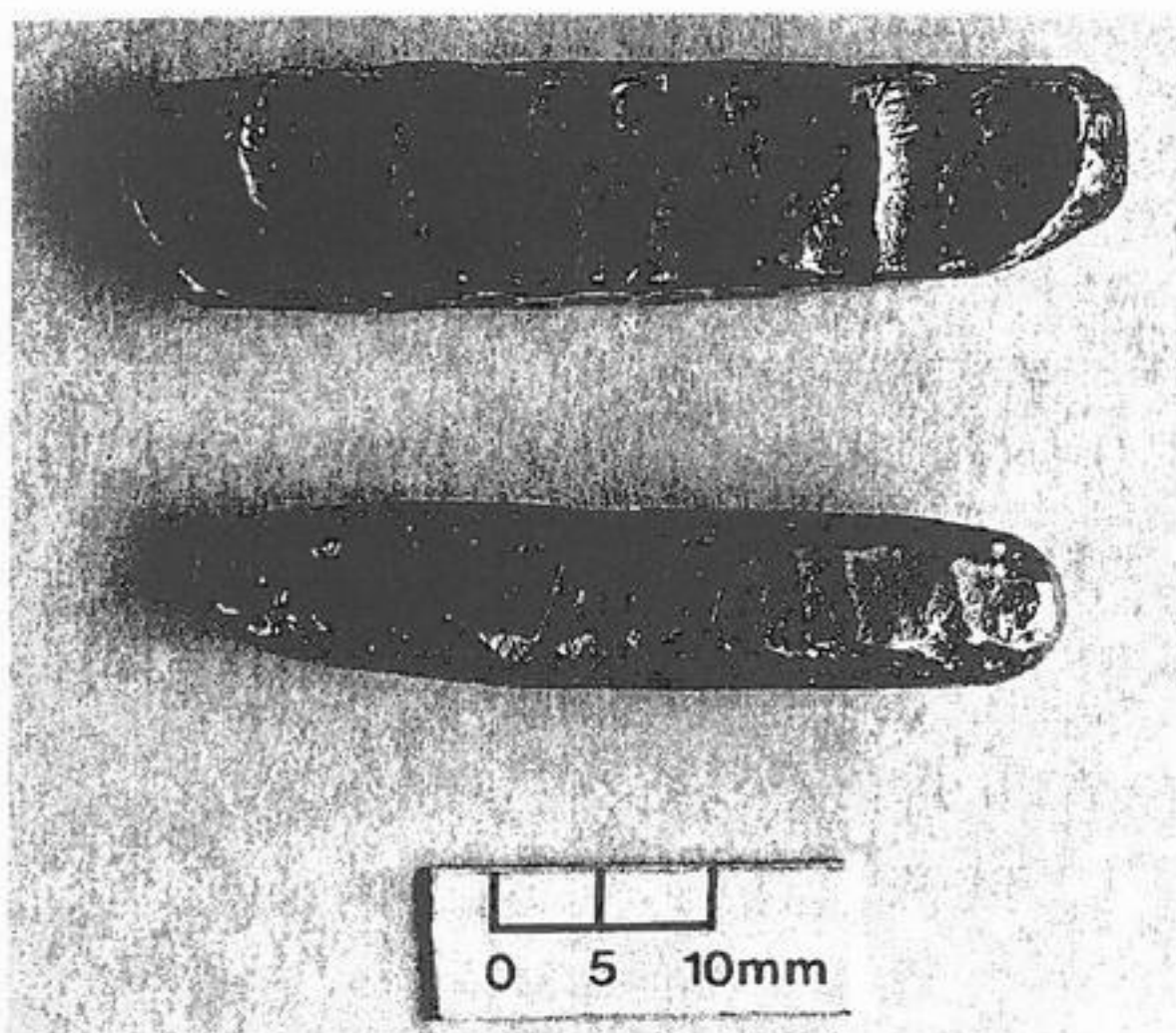
This letter would appear to confirm that there are no grounds for believing that a large hoard of Later Bronze Age ornaments was ever found at Askeaton. Lord Inchiquin's story as recounted by Armstrong about 'the bucketful of gold' seems very confused (see note 12 for reference) and is more likely to have referred to the Great Clare find (*recte* Mooghaun North, Co. Clare) as it appears this incident took place in Mr. Wallace's grandfather's time, his father having come into the business in 1866, twelve years after the discovery at Mooghaun. Lord Inchiquin seems to have conflated two stories and to have mislead Armstrong, hence the reference in his 1917 paper. Mr. Wallace seems quite certain of his information and has proved his reliability on other matters.

However, there are still some matters concerning the form of the Askeaton ingot which require further comment. While the gold ingot NMI 1929:1332 is recorded as having been found at Askeaton in a hoard, it is not the same type as the Mooghaun or Welsh examples,

¹²This refers to E.C.R. Armstrong's paper 'The Great Clare Find of 1854', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 47 (1917), 21-36, wherein he refers to a pair of lock-rings in the possession of Lord Inchiquin and said to be part of the Mooghaun (Great Clare) hoard. In his 1920 Catalogue Armstrong refers to the lock-rings as being from Askeaton citing Scott's Limerick Field Club article which is referred to by J.N.A. Wallace in the course of this letter.

¹³An Article by 'Erigena' in the *Ulster J. Arch.*, 4 (1856), 149-153, describes and illustrates three gold bracelets in the possession of 'Mr. Francis M. Moore, chronometer maker etc., of 114, High Street, Belfast'. The article states that he had bought four bracelets in Limerick in 1855 and had since sold one of them. They were said to have been found on the O'Brien estate in Co. Clare in the early part of 1854. These bracelets must be regarded as part of the Mooghaun hoard. Their present whereabouts is unknown. The fact that Mr. Wallace had the same information and could record it in 1917 is a measure of the trust that can be placed in his account on this and other matters.

which is the only associated Bronze Age form. It most closely resembles a silver ingot found in the excavation of Feltrim Hill, Co. Dublin¹⁴ (Illus. 3). Both share a very distinctive pattern of hammering which gives the impression of interlocking V-shapes. The angular nature of the edges of both ingots is also very similar. This characteristic rippling of the surface can be seen on several unfinished ingots from Viking silver hoards from Scotland¹⁵. It is therefore highly unlikely that the Askeaton ingot, in its present form, can be dated to the Bronze Age. Given the presence of significant finds of Early Christian and Viking period metalwork in silver and gold¹⁶ in Co. Limerick, it is not totally unexpected that a gold ingot of later date should be found in this area. However, it is also important to note that an analysis of this piece places it within the group of objects identified with the Dowris Phase of the Later Bronze Age¹⁷. It may be suggested that, originally, the Askeaton ingot was an object of Later Bronze Age date, discovered some time in the 9th to 11th centuries, melted down and reworked into an ingot of typical Viking type. For this reason it has been listed in the appendix. However it should not be considered to be part of the hoard of Later Bronze Age gold from Askeaton to which, on the present evidence, only a bracelet and a pair of lock-rings can be definitely ascribed, unless it may be proposed that the four objects were intended to be re-worked.



Illus. 3 Silver Ingot, Feltrim Hill, Co. Dublin, and Gold Ingot, Askeaton, Co. Limerick.
(Photo: National Museum of Ireland)

¹⁴NMI 1947:426. See P.J. Hartnett and G. Eogan, 'Feltrim Hill, Co. Dublin; A Neolithic and Early Christian Site', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 94 (1964), 1-37.

¹⁵See the Skail hoard (No. 24.92, p. 121 and pl. 48c) in James Graham-Campbell, *The Viking-Age Gold and Silver (AD 850-1100)*, Edinburgh 1995.

¹⁶For example, the 9th century gold brooch from Kilfinnane, Co. Limerick (NMI 1993:53). See R. Ó Floinn, 'A Gold Brooch from Kilfinnane, Co. Limerick', *Archaeology Ireland*, 7:3 (1993), 10, and M. Cahill and R. Ó Floinn, 'Two Silver Kite-shaped Brooches from Co. Limerick' *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.* (forthcoming). The hoard of silver coins and ingots from Mungret, Co. Limerick, dating to the 10th Century, is also of particular importance in this context. See R.H.M. Dolley, 'Some New Light on the Viking-Age Silver Hoard from Mungret', *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 8:3 (1960), 116-133.

¹⁷A. Hartmann, *Studien zu den Anfänger der Metallurgie, Band 3-Prähistorische Goldfunde aus Europa*, Berlin 1970.

3. Gold dress-fastener terminal, Co. Limerick

NLI Ms. 1415, 222.

Limerick July 10th 1792

Dear Sir,

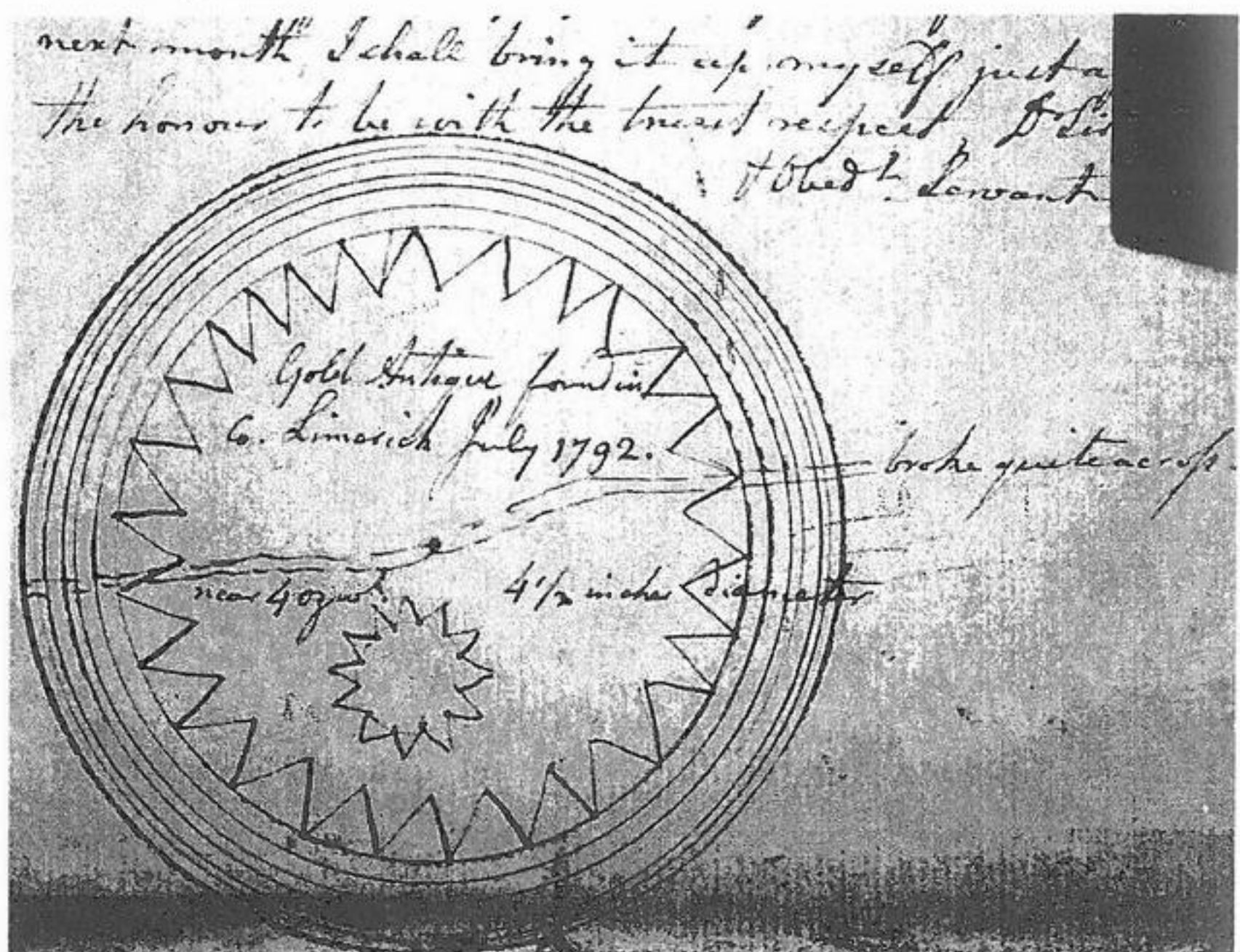
This day One of the Goldsmiths here bought from a peasant an article of *pure gold* found in the County of Limerick, 4 1/2 inches diameter, like the cover of a sugar bowl it is broken quite across the center, but was very neatly finished with a border and slight engraving but no sort of handle - the Goldsmith (Maurice Fitzgerald) demanded 4£ 10 oz for it (it weighs about 4oz) and will keep it 8 or 9 days for my answer - I therefore request to know shall it be bought for you.

I have more than 2lb of *old brass* to send you by the first opportunity to get an assay made of it - if I meet none sooner than next month I shall bring it up myself just after the assize - I have the honour to be with the truest respect Dr Sir - your most faithful and obedient servant

Ralph Ousley

Comment:

It is not known to whom Ralph Ousley addressed his letter. A sketch at the bottom of the letter shows clearly that the object referred to by Ralph Ousley is the terminal of a large gold dress-fastener (Illus. 4). A series of six concentric circles indicates the ribs and grooves of the object.



Illus. 4 Terminal of a Gold Dress-fastener, Co. Limerick. (Photo: National Library of Ireland)

which decorate the area immediately inside the rim of the terminal. A row of triangles is placed against the innermost circle. The apex of the terminal is indicated by a small circle in an off-centre position. It is surrounded by a row of triangles. This feature is common on dress-fasteners where the bow or handle joins the terminal and disguises the join. The terminal was broken in two. The diameter is recorded as $4\frac{1}{2}''/10.15\text{cm}$. The weight of the terminal is recorded as $c.4\text{oz}/124.4\text{g}$. As it is not known whether the bow was hollow or solid it is not possible to estimate the total weight. However by analogy with other objects of similar type and size, it may be estimated that with a hollow bow, the complete object would have weighed at least $10\text{ oz}/311\text{ grammes}$. If the bow was solid it would have weighed considerably more. This object is one of a significant group of exceptionally large and heavy dress-fasteners. One of the main concentrations of deposition of this type of artefact is in the County Limerick, west Tipperary and north Cork area¹⁸. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to suggest that this object has survived.

4. A hoard of ribbon torcs from Herbertstown, Co. Limerick

In his 1983 volume on *Hoard of the Irish Later Bronze Age*, Professor George Eogan published an account of a hoard of twisted gold ornaments found in a rath or mound near Kilmallock/Kilfinnane in 1852. He quoted Thomas Crofton Croker who gave a brief, undiagnostic description of the objects from the hoard¹⁹. Since then a number of other sources of information about this hoard have been discovered. The discovery is recorded by John Windele, the Cork antiquarian, in one of his volumes of antiquarian gleanings.

Royal Irish Academy Windele Mss. 12 C 2, 569.

May 1852 Torques found in a Rath at -----, Co. of Limerick. ----- in number weighing altogether about $2\frac{1}{2}\text{ oz}$. They are thin flat lengths about 1 | | this breadth and twisted widely. Brought to Cork and placed in the National Exhibition 25th May by Rev. Mr. O'Higgins. The finder was rooting for stones and had come to some large ones when he found the treasure. They are all fastened at the extremities by small hooks. [The width indicated should not be regarded as definitive.]

The catalogue²⁰ of the National Exhibition held at Cork contains the following description —

Torques

In a glass-case, set apart for the purpose, were exhibited six articles of gold, found in the year 1852, rolled up together in a rath, on the lands of Herberstown, in the county of Limerick. After having been sold by the finder to a silversmith in Limerick, they were purchased from him by the Rev. Mr. O'Higgins of that city, who, fully estimating their value, placed them in the Cork Exhibition. These remains consist of one large Torquis, or neck ornament, and five armillae or bracelets. The whole formed of long thin bands or strips of gold, rudely twisted spirally, and terminating in hooks of very simple design. The diameter of the Torquis is eight inches, of the

¹⁸M. Cahill, 'Large Gold Dress-fasteners of the Irish Later Bronze Age', in M. Ryan (ed.), *Irish Antiquities – A Memorial Volume for Dr. Joseph Raftery*, (forthcoming).

¹⁹*op.cit.*, pp. 205–206.

²⁰Maguire, John F, *The Industrial Movement in Ireland, as illustrated by the National Exhibition of 1852*, Cork 1853.

armlets five, and of the bracelet two-and-a-half, and the entire weight between two and three ounces. Since the Exhibition these articles were purchased by Lord Londesborough for £30, and exhibited by his Lordship to the Society of Antiquaries on the 10th of February, 1853.

An account of the meeting of the Society of Antiquaries, London, records the following –

A Note from Lord Londesborough to the President was read, forwarding for exhibition to the Society a Case of Gold Ornaments from Ireland. They were found during last year by a peasant whilst picking for stones in a 'Rath' near Kilmallock and Kilfinnan, in the county of Limerick. The finder described them as rolled together, and as if they had not been protected by any sort of envelope. He offered them for sale to various silversmiths of Limerick, and a Roman Catholic clergyman (the Rev. J. O'Higgin) purchased them to save them from the crucible. Lord Londesborough obtained them from that gentleman.

A few years later, in 1856, at a meeting of the Cambrian Archaeological Association held at Welshpool, an exhibition of antiquities took place. Amongst the objects recorded as having been exhibited on that occasion was a 'Gold Torc ring from Kilmallock, county Limerick. This ring is a miniature twisted torc, without curved ends'. It was exhibited by W.W.E. Wynne, Esq., M.P. According to Miss Lily F. Chitty, in a note to Professor Eogan in 1969, 'Mr. Wynne was a well known antiquary of Peniorth, Merioneth, whose collection was obtained for National Museum Wales, Cardiff, by [Sir] R.E. Mortimer Wheeler in 1924, who went and fetched what he could find by permission of the then Mrs. Wynne'. Unfortunately, the National Museum of Wales have no record of a gold torc in its detailed listing of the Wynne collection²¹.

5. Hoard of two gold ornaments, Cooga, Co. Limerick

The 1927 2nd edition 6 inch OS Sheet No. 15 for Co. Limerick notes the find place of 'Gold Ornaments found AD 1867' in the townland of Cooga Lower. The registers of the Royal Irish Academy do not record the acquisition of any material from that townland in 1867 or any subsequent year. Local inquiries made through Mr. Benny O'Neill, Killuragh, Cappamore, Co. Limerick, confirmed that the discovery of two gold ornaments, one of very substantial weight and the other much smaller, on the lands of the Crowe family had occurred in 1867 and that the objects had been sent to Dublin²². Further inquiries made at the Ordnance Survey Office produced the authority for the findplace marked on the map. This is a letter written in 1902 by a former curate in the parish of Doon, Fr. John Power, recording his account of the event²³. The letter is quite detailed and records that gold ornaments were found at Cooga in 1867, the price paid for the objects and, significantly, the fact that Fr. Power saw them in the possession of Sir William Wilde and that they had been bought for the Royal Irish Academy or Museum in Dublin. All references to the discovery and acquisition of the objects are reproduced below in chronological order.

²¹I am grateful to Dr. S.H.R. Aldhouse-Green, Keeper of Archaeology and Numismatics, National Museum of Wales, for this information.

²²I am very grateful to Mr. Benny O'Neill, Killuragh, Cappamore, who undertook to make the enquiries locally on my behalf. Mr O'Neill is a cousin of the Crowe family who still live at Cooga Lower.

²³I am grateful to Mr. Paul Walsh, Archaeologist, Megalithic Survey of Ireland, for providing me with a copy of the letters and other relevant details. I also acknowledge the permission of Mr. Richard Kirwan, Director of Operations, Ordnance Survey, for permission to publish the letters.

The Minute Book of the Antiquities Committee of the Academy records the following entry on the 27th April 1867 –

The Committee examined two gold fibulae from Limerick one weighing 28 oz and the other 4 oz $\frac{1}{2}$.

Resolved

That Sir William Wilde and the Librarian be authorised to recommend the purchase of the two articles, - under Treasure Trove, at the rate now agreed by this Committee.

Proposed by D H Kelly Esq

Seconded by W J O'Donovan LLD

A special register to record material acquired under the Treasure Trove regulations had been set up in 1860 by the Academy²⁴. The following entry is recorded on 13th May 1867 -

2 gold antique fibulae weigh together 36oz 17dwts. Found by Carey of Kilcommon, Co. Tipperary (Par. Templederry)
Dep. Canock Tait & Co. Limerick.

The entry in the Academy's Acquisition Register records the following details: -

2599 1867 Cupped Fibula, Gold

Weight 28 oz 4 dwt 21 gr

Found in the townland of Kilco- ['mmon' has been added in later], parish of Templederry, Co. Tipperary

2600 Cupped Fibula, Gold - cut in two.

Weight 4 oz 11 dwt 16 gr

From the same locality. Purchased as Treasure Trove with No. 2599 for £142.15.10 13th May

Treasure Trove Register p. 70. Ant. Comm. Min. vol. III p. - April 27th 1867. [both quoted above]²⁵

A second register of acquisitions also exists. It reads as follow: -

2599 1867 May 13. A very massive plain gold fibula of penannular shape weighing 28 oz 4 dwts 21 grs - the heaviest piece of antique manufactured gold now known in Ireland

Found in the townland of Kilco- (*sic*), parish of Templederry, Co. Tipperary

Procured under Treasure Trove, cost £145.15.0 with the following fibula

2600 A gold Fibula cut in two - weight 4 oz 11 dwts

16 grs

Ditto

Ditto See also Com. Ants Minutes Book Vol. III p. - Apr. 27 1867.

Two letters from the Ordnance Survey records are transcribed as follows: -

Kilteely, Pallasgreen.

May 6. 1902

Dear Sir,

The ornaments found in Cooga in 1867 were gold fibulae or clasps used by the

²⁴A. Ireland, 'The Finding of the "Clonmacnoise" Gold Torcs', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 92C (1992), 123-146.

²⁵The prefix 'R' is now used to indicate that these numbers refer to the Register of the Royal Irish Academy opened in 1859. These objects are now R2599 and R2600 respectively.

chieftains to fasten on their cloaks and they were horse shoe shap (*sic*) - somewhat flattened, of plain make no filigree or tracery whatever one was small worth about £37 (thirty seven). The large one was worth a hundred more, they were sold at Cannocks Limerick for their worth as pure gold. They then passed up to Dublin and I saw them in the possession of the late Sir William Wilde who told me they were bought for the Royal Irish Academy or Museum in Dublin, where they are no doubt at present. Tis well at all events to have on your map the place they were found, and as well as I remember they were found to the west of M. Crowe's house on the border of the bog of [?] Denis Crowe who found the large one will point out [to] you the precise spot. There again I found that at that time there was a tradition amongst the people that there was a battle fought there by the Celts against the Danes, and that there was there the ruins of a Danish limekiln, which was a primitive one. Simply excavate a cavity on the brow of some little precipice. This is all the information I can now remember concerning these ornaments

I am Sir yours truly
John Power

2nd Cpl Morris RE
Doon

O.S. Doon 7.2.02
Colonel Conder,

Sir

I beg to forward the attached letter from Rev. J. Power P.P. Killeely.

I beg to add that I have marked the site where the ornaments were found, on trace 15/12.5.

H. Morris
2nd Cpl RE

P.S. Sir

I beg to add that *Fr. Power was a curate in Doon at the time the ornaments were found.*

H.M. 2nd Cpl RE

Comment:

It is clear that at some point confusion has entered the Academy records as the very first account of the Academy's Antiquities Committee had recorded that the gold objects had come from Co. Limerick while the register records, a little later, that they had come from the townland of Kilcommon, parish of Templederry, Co. Tipperary. Armstrong²⁶ does not record any findplace for the objects but states that they were both found, probably together, (but says that the register does not definitely state so), by M. Carey of Kilcommon, Templederry, Co. Tipperary and purchased from Messrs. Cannock, Tait & Co., Limerick. However the register does state that both were found together. Taylor²⁷ accepted the Kilcommon provenance. Eogan²⁸ also accepted the Kilcommon provenance but states that there is no definite information about the find circumstances or the exact place of discovery.

²⁶Armstrong, *op.cit.* (note 1), p. 73.

²⁷Taylor, *op.cit.* (note 1), p. 113.

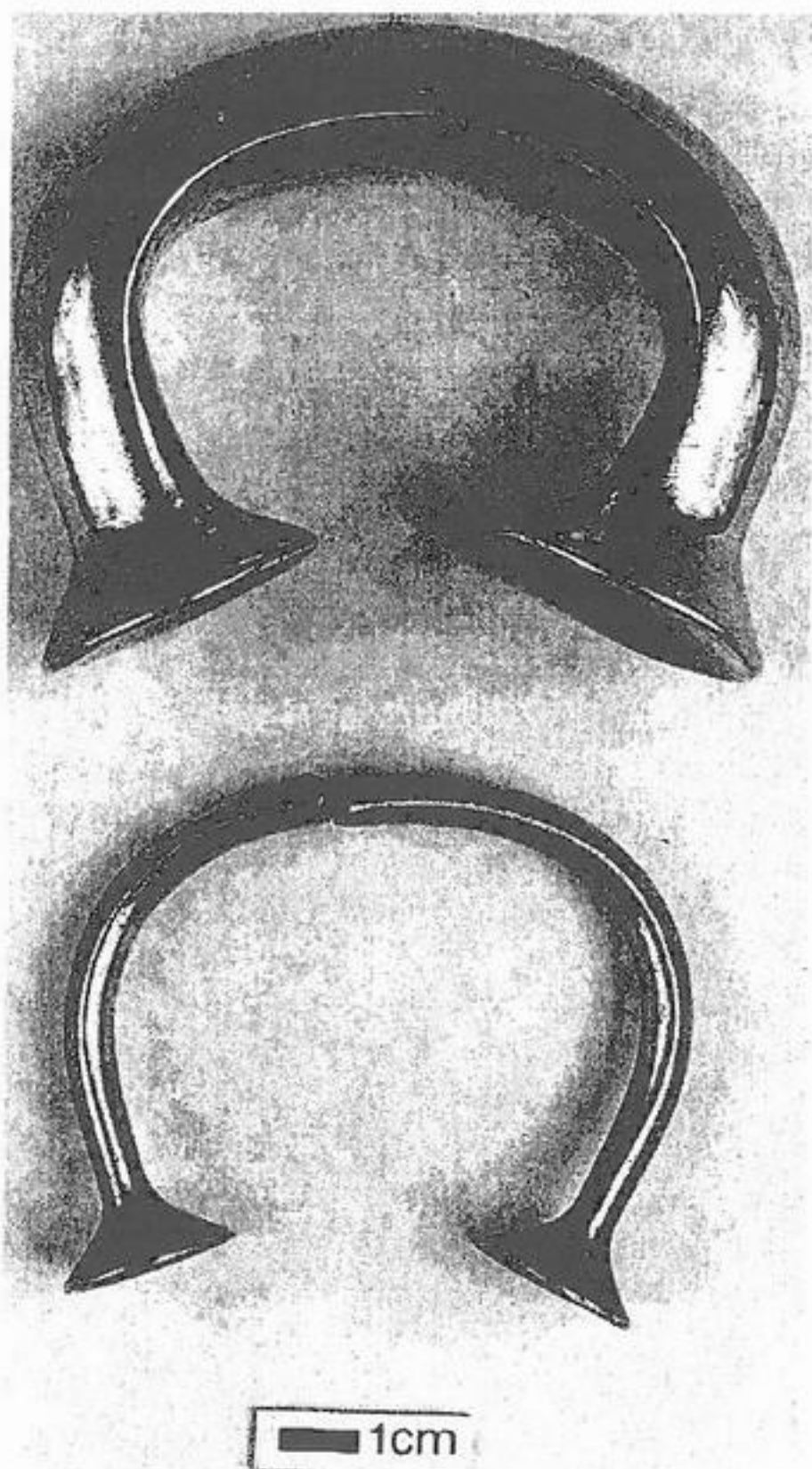
²⁸George Eogan, *Hoard of the Irish Later Bronze Age*, Dublin 1983, pp. 196-197.

The identification of the true provenance for these objects is further complicated by an examination of the location of the townland names Cooga and Kilcommon. The *Census of Ireland Townland Index* of 1861 notes townlands Cooga Lower and Upper, parish of Doon, barony of Coonagh, County of Limerick, on 6-inch O.S. sheets 15 and 16. A townland named Cooga is also recorded in the parish of Upperchurch, barony of Kilnahanagh Upper, County of Tipperary on O.S. sheets 39 and 40.

Kilcommon, parish Templebeg, barony Kilnahanagh Upper, County of Tipperary is recorded on 6-inch O.S. sheet 39. It will be recalled that all the preceding accounts have recorded Kilcommon in the parish of Templederry. This seems to have been an error as the parish of Templederry is adjacent to the parish of Templebeg on 6-inch O.S. sheets 27, 33 and 39. Cooga, Co. Tipperary and Kilcommon are on the same O.S. sheet within 4½ miles of one another while the adjoining townlands of Cooga Upper and Cooga Lower, Co. Limerick are approximately 11 miles from Kilcommon, Co. Tipperary.

Fr. Power notes that the findplace is to the west of M. Crowe's house. The Academy records give the name of the finder as M. Carey while Fr. Power refers to the finder of the 'large one' as Denis Crowe. The objects were transmitted to the Academy by Cannock, Tait & Co., Limerick City, and it may be that the confusion arose here between the two townlands named Cooga and a person with the initials M.C. I have been informed by Ms. Aideen Ireland, Archivist, National Archives of Ireland, that no Careys are recorded in the townland of Kilcommon, parish of Templebeg, Co. Tipperary, neither in the Tithe Applotment Book for 1829 nor in the Primary Valuation of 1851. There are no Careys or Crowes recorded in the townland of Cooga, Co. Tipperary. On the other hand, no Careys are recorded in the townlands of Cooga Upper and Lower in Co. Limerick. However, William Crowe is recorded in Cooga Upper and Lower in the Primary Valuation of 1851. It is clear that we should therefore rely on the first reference to two gold fibulae from Co. Limerick mentioned in the Academy's minutes on 27th April 1867 and Fr. Power's letter of 1902 which is an eye-witness account and which, from his description of the relative values of the two objects, confirms the fact that two objects of greatly differing weights had been found in 1867.

The larger of the two objects (Illus. 5) from Cooga Lower is a massive cast penannular ring of approximately triangular



Illus. 5 Hoard of Gold Ornaments, Cooga Lower, Co. Limerick. (Photo: National Museum of Ireland)

section with expanded, slightly dished terminals of circular shape. The flat inner surface of the bar has not been completely polished down and marks from the casting are still visible as are numerous hammer marks. The outer surface has been very well finished. The terminals may have been hammered up from the ends of the bar. While it assumes the general form of a bracelet, it is unlikely that this object was ever intended to be worn. The opening is very narrow and due to its extreme weight it could not be worn in any conventional sense on the wrist. It is far more likely that an object of this type is an expression of status, territorial or resource control or was specially made for the purpose of ritual deposition. The maximum lateral width is 9.34cm; max. dimensions of the bar 2.5cm × 1.8cm. The terminals are (i) 3.7cm × 3.64cm; (ii) 3.63cm × 3.67cm in diameter. Weight 878.35 grammes.

The smaller object is a penannular ring of bracelet form with expanded, slightly hollowed terminals. It has been broken in two. The bar is plano-convex in section. The object is well finished with smooth surfaces. Some hammer marks are visible on the internal surface of the bow. The object is now quite scratched in appearance. The maximum lateral width is approx. 7.2cm; max. width of the bar is 1.0cm and max. thickness 0.67cm. The terminals are (i) 2.18cm × 2.26cm and (ii) 2.21cm × 2.23cm. Weight 142.5 grammes.

6. Hoard of three gold bracelets and a gold dress-fastener from Bruree, Co. Limerick

In 1929 the National Museum acquired from a Dublin dealer, Mr. C. Parker Cussen, a piece of ring money from Kilmallock (1929:1302), a gold ingot from Askeaton (see above pp. 10–11), a gold dress-fastener and a gold bracelet from Bruree (1929:1303, 1304). The objects had originally been in the possession of Mr. J.N.A. Wallace, the Limerick City jeweller, through whose family firm in the nineteenth century many gold objects had passed. Some years later, Dr. Joseph Raftery wrote to Mr. Wallace requesting information on these objects. Mr. Wallace replied that of the ring money and ingot he knew no more than was published by George Scott (*op. cit.*, note 1). Regarding the material from Bruree, he stated that 'the three Bruree pieces were found in making a ditch or fence in a field known as the Lime Kiln by a man whose name was, I think, Fitzgerald'. When Dr. Raftery later sought further clarification Mr. Wallace replied: -

The Bruree objects came into our possession so long ago that I am very hazy about all the circumstances. It was in my father's time. One thing I am certain of, viz., there was another bracelet with the lot. This was the heaviest of the bracelets and makes the total Bruree find up to 4 (3 bracelets, 1 cloak-fastener??)²⁹. The heavy bracelet was sold by my father to a lady. I know where it is but have no chance of getting it back.

An examination of the O.S. 1st Ed. (1840) 6-inch Sheet No. 39 shows that there was a lime kiln in the townland of Ballyhinnaught which is situated about a half mile west of Bruree village. Extensive local enquiries which were very kindly undertaken by Mr. Mainchín Seoighe suggest that a field in the townland of Fortyacres was known as the Lime Kiln Field. This townland shares part of its boundary with the townland of Ballyhinnaught. Mr. Seoighe also informs me that a family named Fitzgerald owned land in the townland of Knockaunacreeva about two and a half miles northwest of Bruree. There was a limestone quarry on this land. While it seems reasonable to accept that this group of objects should be considered as a hoard, in the absence of any further corroboration it is wiser to refer to its provenance as 'near Bruree'.

²⁹The question marks are presumably intended to refer to the identification of the piece as a dress-fastener.

7. A Hoard of Bronzes from Moroe, Co. Limerick

RIA Windele Ms. 4 B 11, p. 9.

Apr. 3/51

Dear Mr. Windele,

I return Petrie with thanks – I saw Mr. Haines yesterday and he desires me to say that the small, beautiful formed bronze celt which you saw with the ring money at Mr. Sainthill's was also found *with* the articles at Moroe Co. Limerick.

faithfully yrs

W.C. Neligan

Thursday

Could you spare a copy of your printed letter to Petrie? - I was not aware of it before.

RIA Windele Ms. 4 B 11, p. 19.

Wednesday

Dear Mr. Windele,

You will oblige by sending your copy of Petrie to compare with mine.

Perhaps you may wish to know that the large brass piece of ring money which you saw some time ago at Mr. Sainthills, and which belongs to Mr. Haines of Mallow was found with the brass sword blade, celts, rings etc. which you saw with me - at Moroe, Co. Limerick - I say 'with', for all were found in one spot. - Mr. H. took only the piece of ring money the other matters were sent to me.

Yours very truly

W.C. Neligan

Comment:

These brief letters from the Rev Mr. William Neligan, Rector of Shandon in Cork City, were written to the well-known Cork antiquarian John Windele. Mr. Neligan collected antiquities, books and other collectables and held several auctions of his collections. The letters refer indirectly to a substantial hoard of bronze objects which seem to have consisted of a bronze sword, several bronze axes and bronze rings. I have not been able to identify any other source of information on this hoard. It appears to have been in the possession of a Mr. Haines of Mallow who is not a recognised collector. However there were many minor collectors in the Cork area at this time with small collections of archaeological objects. Collectors in different areas maintained contact with one another notifying each other about new finds and their availability. They were not necessarily concerned about ensuring that the integrity of individual hoards was retained and as a result many hoards have been split up. In the absence of a more detailed record it is impossible to reconstruct the Moroe hoard. In composition, it may be compared to the hoard of bronze rings and a bronze axe from near Glenstal, Co. Limerick (NMI 1901:47-51) about one mile east of Moroe (O.S. 6, Sheet No. 6). However, the knowledge of its existence and its contents does add some detail to the general distribution of Later Bronze Age bronze metalwork from Co. Limerick.

CONCLUSIONS

Antiquarian records are an invaluable source of information on archaeological objects which are now no longer traceable in public or private collections or which have been recorded as unlocalised. They may reveal the names of find places and details of the circumstances of discovery. In the case of Bronze Age gold this may be especially valuable as so little is known about how objects of this period were deposited in the ground originally. While the present paper adds considerably to our knowledge of gold finds from the Limerick area it is noticeable that none of the newly described objects are of Earlier Bronze Age date. All, with the exception of the hoard of ribbon torcs which are customarily dated to the Bishopsland phase of the Later Bronze Age c. 1200–1000 BC, can be dated to the Dowris phase of the Later Bronze Age c. 700–800 BC. The only piece of Earlier Bronze Age gold recorded from Co. Limerick is the disc of sheet gold from Site D, Lough Gur.

It is regrettable that the eighteenth century accounts do not specify where these objects were found as perhaps the most valuable contribution these records can make is in amplifying the distribution maps of the period which at best can only ever represent a fraction of the material which was circulating in society during any particular stage³⁰. While the overwhelming richness of the North Munster area has been recognised and recorded, the present paper increases considerably the number of gold artifacts known from the Co. Limerick area further emphasising the significance of the gold-working industries of the region.

APPENDIX

Bronze Age Gold from Co. Limerick

<i>Townland</i>		<i>Type of Object</i>	<i>Reg. No.</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Askeaton	H?*	Ingot	NMI 1929:1332	Scott <i>op.cit.</i> (note 1) 32–35
Askeaton	H	Lock-ring	pwu**	Armstrong <i>op.cit.</i> (note 1) 18
Askeaton	H	Lock-ring	pwu	"
Askeaton	H	Bracelet	Mrs. Wallace's bracelet/pwu	this paper
Bruree	H	Dress-fastener	NMI 1929:1303	unpublished
Bruree	H	Bracelet	NMI 1929:1304	"
Bruree	H	Bracelet	pwu	"
Bruree	H	Bracelet	pwu	"
Castletroy		Bracelet	pwu	Cahill 1994, (note 2), 71–72
Cooga Lower	H	Bracelet	R2599	this paper
Cooga Lower	H	Bracelet	R2600	"
Cooltomin		Bar torc	NMI 1926:49	unpublished

* Part of a hoard.

**Present whereabouts unknown.

³⁰P.C. Woodman, 'The Prehistory of South-West Ireland – An Archaeological Region or a State of Mind?', pp. 6–15, in Shee Twohig, E. and Ronayne, M. (eds.), *Past Perceptions: The Prehistoric Archaeology of South-West Ireland*, Cork 1993.

Herbertstown	H	Ribbon torcs?	pwu	this paper
Kilmallock		Foil-covered penannular ring	NMI 1929:1302	unpublished
Kilpeacon		Hat or vessel?	pwu	Eogan 1981, 349 Gerloff 1995, 186 ³¹
Site D Lough Gur		Disc	pwu	Ó Ríordáin 1953–54 410–411 ³²
Lough Gur		Bar twist earring	Private	unpublished
Lough Gur		Fragment gold bar	E549:895	Cleary forthcoming ³³
Lough Gur		Foil	E549:1370	"
Lough Gur		Bronze spearhead with gold foil inlay on socket	Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford	Coles 1971, 94–95 ³⁴
Rockstown or Rochestown Castle		Fragment hollow bar?	pwu	Scott <i>op.cit.</i> (note 1), 34–35
Shannongrove		Collar	Victoria & Albert Museum M.35.1948	Powell 1973–74 ³⁵
Springfield		Bracelet	NMI 1945:366	unpublished
Tooradoo	H	Decorated foil- covered penannular ring	NMI 1927:2	Eogan 1983, 104–105 ³⁶
Tooradoo	H	"	NMI 1927:2	"
Tooradoo	H	"	NMI 1927:2	"
Tooradoo	H	"	NMI 1927:2	"
Tooradoo	H	"	NMI 1927:2	"
Toryhill		Collar	NMI W18	Wilde <i>op.cit.</i> 24 Armstrong <i>op.cit.</i> (note 1), 58

³¹G. Eogan, 'The Gold Vessels of the Bronze Age in Ireland and Beyond', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 81C (1981), 345–382. S. Gerloff, 'Bronzezeitliche Goldblechkronen aus Westeuropa', in Jockenhövel, A. (ed.) *Festschrift für Hermann Müller-Karpe zum 70. Geburtstag*, Bonn 1995. Gerloff's recent paper disagrees with Eogan in that she prefers to consider these objects as hats or crowns rather than vessels. Given that they all appear to have had pointed bases it is unlikely that they could have been used as vessels. Only one, unlocalised, specimen from Ireland survives (NMI W19).

³²S.P. Ó Ríordáin, 'Lough Gur Excavations: Neolithic and Bronze Age Houses on Knockadoon', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 56C (1953–54), 297–459.

³³R.M. Cleary 'An Enclosed Later Bronze Age Hut Site and Field Fence at Lough Gur', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, (forthcoming). Ms. Cleary has kindly allowed me to refer to this material prior to her own publication.

³⁴J.M. Coles, 'Bronze Age Spearheads with Gold Decoration', *Antiqs. J.* 51 (1971), 94–95.

³⁵T.G.E. Powell, 'The Sintra Collar and the Shannongrove Gorget: aspects of Late Bronze Age goldwork in the west of Europe', *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 16 (1973–74), 3–13.

³⁶Eogan, *op.cit.* (note 27).

Co. Limerick?		Hat or vessel?		Scott <i>op.cit.</i> (note 1), 27 ³⁷ Eogan <i>op.cit.</i> 350 Gerloff <i>op.cit.</i> (note 32), 186 Cahill 1991, (note 2), 99 Cahill 1994, (note 2), 71
Co. Limerick		Dress-fastener	NMI W148	
Co. Limerick	H	Lock-ring	NMI 1881:94	
"	H	"	NMI 1881:95	"
"	H	"	NMI 1881:96	"
"	H	"	NMI 1881:97	"
"	H	Bracelet	NMI 1881:98	"
"	H	Bracelet	NMI 1881:99	"
"	H	Bracelet	NMI 1881:100	"
"	H	Penannular gold ring	NMI 1881:107	"
Co. Limerick	H?	Bracelet	BM 49.3-1.4	Cahill 1994, (note 2), 70-71
Co. Limerick	H?	Bracelet	BM 49.3-1.5	"
Co. Limerick		Dress-fastener	pwu	Cahill 1994, (note 2), 84-90 ³⁸
Co. Limerick?		Large ring	pwu	Cahill 1994, (note 2), 89-90
Co. Limerick?		U-shaped ring	pwu	"
Co. Limerick?		Dress-fastener	pwu	NLI Ms. 1415; this paper
Co. Limerick		Dress-fastener terminal	pwu	NLI Ms. 1415; this paper and Cahill forthcoming ³⁹
Co. Limerick?	H	Ingot	pwu	NLI Ms. 1415; this paper
"	H	Cup-ended ornament	pwu	"
"	H	"	pwu	"
"	H	"	pwu	"
"	H	"	pwu	"
Co. Limerick		Bronze sword with gold foil inlay on hilt	NMI W38	Wilde 1861, 445 ⁴⁰

³⁷Scott (*op.cit.* note 1) does not say that this object was found in Co. Limerick. His paper deals with material from Cos. Clare, Limerick and Tipperary, and the piece on the crown is headed 'in all probability from this district'. It does appear that the object was certainly melted down in Limerick.

³⁸Cahill records this piece as unprovenanced. A note published in the *J. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, 3 (1848), indicates that it was found in Co. Limerick although the townland name is not given.

³⁹M. Cahill, *op.cit.*, note 18.

⁴⁰W.R. Wilde, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Antiquities of Animal Materials and Bronze in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy*, Dublin 1861.

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