Two Silver Kite Brooches from near Limerick City

MARY CAHILL and RAGHNALL Ó FLOINN *

The discovery of two tenth-century silver kite brooches near Limerick city in 1845 is discussed. Contemporary antiquarian records confirm the provenance and the find is placed in its cultural context. Several other new and neglected objects of the period are also discussed.

* * * *

It has long been generally accepted that the two silver kite brooches registered as 1874:73 and 1881:114 in the collections of the National Museum of Ireland are from Co. Kilkenny and that they were found together1. These remarkable objects, which are easily recognisable by their extremely long pins and kite-shaped heads, date to the tenth century and form part of a much larger group of silver pins and brooches exhibiting influence in form and style from the Viking world.

The brooches were acquired by the Royal Irish Academy on two separate occasions in the second half of the nineteenth century, one having first found its way to England, the other having remained in a large private collection in Ireland. How precisely the Kilkenny provenance came to be associated with the brooches is not clear but it may relate to the fact that one of the individuals involved had strong family connections with Co. Kilkenny (see A. Ireland, this volume, pp. 83–86).

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it publishes a detailed record of the brooches from the time they appeared on the antiquarian market and shows that, far from being found in Co. Kilkenny, they were found together in Co. Limerick in 1845. This information is derived from contemporary nineteenth-century sources. These are the papers of the Cork antiquarian, John Windele who, in maintaining an extensive correspondence with his fellow antiquarians and collectors, documented many important archaeological discoveries of the 1800s2. Secondly, it records a number of other new and neglected finds of ninth and tenth century silver and gold brooches from the county and discusses the implications of this new body of material for the study of the metalwork of this period3.

THE ANTIQUARIAN EVIDENCE

The evidence by which the new provenance for the kite brooches can be identified is contained in a series of letters written by the collector and museum keeper, Redmond Anthony of Piltown, Co. Kilkenny, to John Windele, of Blair’s Castle, Cork. As will be seen from the text of the letters, Redmond Anthony coveted these pins from the first moment he heard of them and wished to possess them for his collection. He was seriously aggrieved

---

1Irish Antiquities Division, National Museum of Ireland, Kildare St., Dublin 2.
4M. C. is responsible for the documentary evidence. R.O.F. for the discussion.
when he failed to procure them and was extremely resentful of the manner by which he lost
them. It is ironic that neither of the two collectors into whose possession they came have left a
line to record their discovery or provenance. One was Dr. William Burgess of Duckett Street,
Clonmel, Co. Tipperary; the other was Mr. William Perry of Woodrooff House, Clonmel, later
of Newtownpark Avenue, Blackrock, Co. Dublin. Unfortunately, Redmond Anthony's efforts
to purchase the pair of pins were thwarted and they were separated, one going to Dr. Burgess
and the other to Mr. Perry. However, Anthony's great excitement at their discovery and
immediate recognition of their rarity and quality resulted in his communicating to John
Windele every detail he could glean about them. The correspondence provides an insight into
the way collectors communicated with the jewellery trade and with one another. The spirit of
competition between collectors is very evident and there is a strong impression of the jealous
protection and cultivation of possible sources of desirable antiquities.

Unless otherwise indicated, all letters or extracts from letters are from Redmond Anthony
to John Windele. The correspondence on the kite brooches took place between November
24th 1845 and 11th August 1846. All the original spellings, punctuation, syntax and style
have been retained, in spite of Redmond Anthony's wide variation of usage.

John Windele often entered in his volumes of notes and gleanings, condensed from his
correspondence, the essential details of interesting discoveries. His account of the discovery
of the kite brooches in Co. Limerick is summarised in two entries as follows:-

Royal Irish Academy Windele MS 1217, p. 599/621
Nov Recently was dug up in the Co of Limerick two of the very rarest silver fibulae ever found in
Ireland. One is two feet long, Jewelled including the pins weighs 10 oz.
The other is 20 inches in length, Jewelled and weighs 7 oz and of most elaborate workmanship both
of them. It was intended that they should be offered for sale to Mr Anthony of Piltown. They were
brought in by a countryman to Limerick on Saturday the 22nd Nov and disposed of to Mr. Walsh
Jeweller of that City who tho he assured Mr. A. they should be sent to him, yet in one or two days
after he wrote to say they had gone. In fact he sold them to Mr. John Abell of Limerick for Ten
Guineas.
Six inches of both were most elaborately carved.
They are says Mr. Anthony the rarest of the rare.

RIA Windele MS 1217, p. 603/635
In Nov 1845 John Abell of Limerick purchased from Mr. Walsh a Jeweller of that town two Silver
Fibula and a very ancient candle stick for which he paid 10 Guineas. One of these, a monster Fibula
is two feet in length, that is the pin. Mr. Abell sold them to a Dr. Burgess of Clonmel and he Dr. B.
intended one of them for a Mr. Perry a collector of that town. Their Weight was about 17 oz & the
length of each about 2 feet.
These pins have since been lithographed.
Dr. Burgess died in May 1846 and his antiquities, including the above, were sent to Dublin for sale.

RIA Windele MS 4 B 5, pp. 1181–1188, extract.
Piltown 24th Nov 1845
I this morning received a letter announcing a recent digging up in a neighbouring County -
two of the very rarest Silver Fibulae or Surveying pins\(^5\) in Ireland, (a pair of hinges to each).

\(^4\)Now College Avenue. In 1846, Dr. Burgess was listed as practising at 5 Prince Edward's Place, see *I. Slater's National Commercial

\(^5\)The use of the term 'surveying pin' was an 'in-joke' between Redmond Anthony and John Windele.
One is two feet in length including ----- pins, jewelled and weighs 10 oz. The other is 20 inches in length jewelled and weighs 7 oz and of most elaborate workmanship, both of them, a sketch of them are sent to me and on receipt of my letter are to be forwarded by day car - my informant writes without any disappointment, should I get them here, - unless the prize amounts to a prohibition I will retain them.

Did you ever read of such stupendous antiquities, no -never I am sure.

Should I be the fortunate possessor - they shall be sent you to Cork - not for your Cuverians unless you wish it, they being in my opinion no judge of such. But to all your curious Antiquarian friends.

The RIA can’t produce anything like them, of this I am sure.

I expect them on Wednesday morning after which you will hear from me with inscriptions of three Chinese Seals or Cubes.

They were brought in by a Countryman on Saturday - and may be shewn publicly this day - but if not intercepted today - will be pack’d up on tomorrow - for my Dear Mr. Windele - ever faithfully and respectfully yours ....

**RIA Windele MS 12 L 10, pp. 251–260, extract**

Pitstown Nov 26/45

Persuant to my promise to write to you today on Brooches, I am sorry I did not get them for the following reason from my friend whom is a dealer, but had invariably given me a preference. He writes thus,

"My dear Sir,

I had the pleasure of receiving your letter and will feel happy in forwarding the articles agreeable to your desire. However at present having received some letters from the Country requesting I should not dispose of them 'til Friday, I am therefore unwillingly obliged to detain them until then, but will without any mistake send them to you on Saturday.

Hoping you will pardon this (not my delay) I remain etc. etc."

Now my dear Mr. W, get them here I am Certain, but what Chance have I got to retain them, none I think, delays (in such Cases) are dangerous. Salted on me they will, consequently back they go, though much I would regret them yet if they run high my ardour for them would abate, when I consider having laid out upwards of Fifty pounds this year on the Museum.

There was an ancient altar stick of Brass bought with them. You may have seen such with broad flanges, I have a pair but small in comparison, I order’d this with Brooches, or Surveying pins.

The hight is 14 Inches, - 10 Inches breadth at bottom - 8 Inches middle flange - weight 4 lbs. Thus form’d - [sketch of candlestick in letter; Illus.1] - you must have seen such. I believe it was found with Brooches but this is an immense Size. I desired Guard of coach to call & try to bring the three articles at once to me when the letter of which I send you copy was sent to me by Post.

The Guard on delivering Mail bags to my Son last night he had seen (as he said) a tremendous size Candlestick and numerous gentlemen, two of which had on their fronts those two Silver Brooches, which he said was in length down to their trousers and crowds looking and enquiring to see them. You have engravings in Vallancey & other works and I have engravings also - and had seen at Dr. Tuke's Sale Dublin?, & collection but they were of lillipution Class -

---


7Dr. Thomas Tuke, physician, based at 106 St. Stephen's Green, died in 1826. The contents of his museum were sold at auction in June 1826. The sale catalogue lists several 'Antique Irish Fibulas' of gold and silver - *A Catalogue of the very valuable Collection of Miscellaneous Property which formed The Museum of the Late Doctor Tuke ... by Samuel Jones ... Dublin ...1826, Lots 456, 505 and 515."
Illus. 1. Sketch of candlestick. (Photo: Roy. Irish Acad.)

Comparison to these, Certainly made for a race of men of larger size than our pigmy race, or may perhaps be used for those Cloathing fastenings, conjecture is at fault, [...] must postpone any further comments until I see them. They are perfect he writes me. I send you a sort of Sketch from his, which may not be correct but may serve to give you Some Idea, but you may conclude from what Guard told me, the delay, my chance of them is visionary indeed, I would be glad of yr opinion if beyond my reach and as I have most assuredly a very high regard for my Cork friends, - would they be desirable in your Institution, - or is a private friend of ours? Yr. Institution is like myself I am afraid too poor. I Certainly have it in my power to place them where, and with whom I please, - Such is my confidence in their present possessor, whom never deceived me.

[Sketches of the brooches and notes (Illus. 2) follow]

Largest weighs 10oz - 2 feet long
Head 5 inches long
2 1/2 in breath

Second Size 7oz 20 Inches long
2 1/4 in breath, triangular Shaped

It appears from sketches only one is jewelled, but what those two little round holes are in large Brooch I dont know, if jewelled or not, but with hinges such as these are rare indeed - and double hinges too.

Six inches of this pin is round the remainder square and carved a bow he says over the heads
Pin same as small one
Largest Size Smallest size Brooch

When I get them here I will sketch them as exact as I can for you, but certainly I will give you a much better idea of them, however the above is better than none at all. The animal head and birds are very Singular -, and a Sample of such I never saw nor an engraving of Such.
I am much obliged for the Slip on Cuverian Society - but you did not yet forward me with particulars of finding Bantry fibula 8.

I would be glad of a line from you on the purport of this Letter, at you earliest convenience, and when the Antiquities arrive you shall hear from - my dear Mr. Windele - ever truly and respectfully yours,

Redmond Anthony

PS I am daily improving I thank God

[A note at the side of the page reads]

I write as I do to a friend in a Careless slobering manner blots etc. etc., you must take the will for the deed.

RIAJ Winnel MS 4 B 5, pp. 1193–1196, extract

Piltown 27 November, '45

I am afraid not withstanding the copy of letter I sent you, that I shall never see them much less possessing myself of such magnificent remains of ancient Irish grandeur. This morning's coach, whom had a confidential guard named Doyle, - and brings me commands from Mr. Walsh Jeweller Limerick (whom was in possession of them) Said to our man in delivering the Mail Bags - to acquaint me that they were gone and now not to be had, yet still from his letter I can't believe it, unless tempted by an Influential Gentleman whom he could not resist giving them to. Should it be so I may expect a Letter from him on tomorrow Morning.

8 Cahill, 'Mr. Anthony's Bog Oak Case', pp. 80–81.
This is the person whom produced and sold me the fine perfect Large Fibula which was found at Castle Troy near Limerick and from whom I had many antiquities, and had uniformly given me a preference of all he got in - with this (I should hope not) single exception.

I omitted I believe to Say, that Six Inches of both Silver Fibulas was most elaborately Carved, the remainder was round and plain. Gracious Lord, how Could any man with any pretensions to Character violate his promise under his own hand?

Should it be so, if he had the rarest thing found and brought to him I never will reply to any of his Letters, consequently no further dealing.

I have some influential friends in Limerick that shall know it, if the Case.

He's always in the habit of noticing anything rare he gets in the papers which you may see.

From the crowd of Gentry looking at them, I am sure he had advertised them, and consequently it was that prompted me to observe that they would go above anything I would pay and wish if sent me and I not agree, to have them transferred to some friend mayhap in Cork.

They are the rarest of the rare even yet found in Ireland - though not so ancient as the Bronze Clasp which no doubt were for the most part manufactured in Pagan times.

**RIA Windele MS 4 B 6, pp. 43–46, extract**

28 November, '45 Piltown

I had a letter from Mr. Walsh Jeweller Limerick on the Sale of the Antiquities - which are actually gone from me -and your friend Mr. Abell's brother is the purchaser of all three, though told I was to have them sent to me for inspection and a preference given to me, do I blame him, Mr. A., by no means, but Walsh whose solemn promise I had to forward them for inspection and sale. The prise was only 10 Gs and Guard told me that the Candlestick was not inferior in Antiquity to the rest - so he was told. I would have given certainly if I could not get them less, 15 Gs. for the both.

But I had an idea they would go much higher - which caused me to write you of my wish to have them transferred to one of my Cork friends or Institution, Culd buy them.

You may yet see them in Cork - as they may be sent to his brother, who is unlike his Limerick brother, the veriest jew in Existance, whom would not let me have a pair of his small fibulas which Mr. Perry had afterwards given me for less than he paid John Abell.

Mr. A. informed Walsh that he wd. send me the antiquities to inspect and draw from, which I will not accept of, haveing refused to send me his finer antiquities for inspection.

He's a dealer in Antiquities haveing sold all his Bronzes in Clonmel and Gold do. to Mr. Perry.

I coveted much the 2 foot one being a Monster Fibula, did they find their way to any other in the dealing way. I might still have a chance for one. Walsh treated me very basely, and in my letter to him today I did not spare him wherein he was told there was an end to our correspondence and that I would have no further dealing.

**RIA Windele MS 12 L 10, pp. 265–266, R. Davis Jr to Redmon Anthony included with a letter to J. Windele, extract**

Clonmel 2/12/1845

R Anthony

Dear Friend,

Thine of yesterday is to hand and Should have been replied to earlier but for two causes - one that I was from home and the other that thy letter was directed to my father instead of to myself.

---

9Present whereabouts unknown. See Cahill, 'Mr. Anthony's Bog Oak Case', pp. 71–72.
11The inn at Piltown where Redmond Anthony lived was also a Post Office and stop for Bianconi's cars.
The Silver brooches to which thou alludes a friend of mine bought for Dr. Burgess - in whose hands they now are he wants one for W Perry & intends keeping the other himself they are magnificent relics - Wt abt 17oz length abt 2 feet. Dr. B. will shew them to thee on thy next coming to town - he does not seem inclined to part his at all whether he wd do so in the course of time or not I can't say. Perhaps a tempting offer might coax him after sometime.

I think these are nearly unique - I purpose leaving this for London on the 4th. Can I do anything there for thee?

Thine in great haste
R Davis Junr.

Piltown 3/12/45 [on same sheet in a black border]

You see my paper is in mourning for the loss of the antique relics, the monster Fibulas, whom pass'd away from me - and for ever. Had I proposed a Sum for them on receiving drawings I was "all right" but depending on Walshs letter through me out.

Gracious God why did he advertise at all without waiting the highest bidder? his doing so put at least 5£ out of his own pockett - and lost them to me, though not seeing them, from the description given me by my Son (whom has an Establishment in Clonmel as Carver and Gilder). I offered as much for the one large one as both cost.

Well, I have now one consolation in hope that all bad Luck may dureing my life disappear with them.

Its consoling also that I can see them, if it was only to fret me more. I had thought Abell bought them for himself (keeping Candlestick) but was by order from Mr. Davis (for Dr. Burgess) whose letter is annex'd, they were dog cheap at £20.

Well, my master 100 an odd railways in Ireland may throw up more monster Fibulas and plenty of other antiquities, for Irish Ground is all one vast Museum.

**RIA Windele MS 4 B 6, pp. 47-50, extract**

**Piltown 10.12.45**

I received a Letter explanatory since from Mr. Walsh Limerick - and find it was his Father whom sold Fibulas - in his son's absence at a Sessions - by which accident I certainly lost them and writes if possible, - it caused more regret to him than to me and as for the advertisement, one of the Editors of Limerick Paper Call'd to see them and reported them - which when seen at Clonmel, an order was sent at once by Mr. Davis to Mr. Abell to buy them. It was the unlucky publishing of them which lost them to [me?], My dear Mr. Windele

**RIA Windele MS 4 B 6, pp. 251-252**

**Piltown 24.3.46**

I now send you a scandalous Lithograph of a pair of as Curious Antiquities as is in any Collection in Ireland. The largest is gone off. I had seen but the other - which is an antique beuty - being so Elaborately Engraved - and much like our crescents. I offered 8£ for this but no go - both bought for 10Gs - & missed them by his damned advertisement. If sent me and left to myself, I would have offered 15Gs. for them and thankful at that price. They are certainly of very early workmanship & design the animal heads similar to Pagan times.

Dr. Burgess told me his was most Perfect, however at Glendalough, Cashel and other places built in Christian times - animal heads and grotesque figures were sculptured, at all events Conjecture is at fault, what race of men wore such? perhaps horses.

Oh what a miss for my Museum..............

Walsh Sent me from Limerick one of the most beautifull Small altar Spoons in Silver, my eyes
had ever seen - the Engraving sharp and beautifull in perfect order - or it is a representation of a Crozier - you shall see it, prise 7/6, - found on ripping up old flooring of the Cathedral, - hes to send me everything in future and were it not for his Father's hastiness in his son's absence I would have had brooches.

RIA Windele MS 4 B 6, pp. 275–278, extract
Piltown April 16/46
Dr. Burgess of Clonmel wrote me for your address to forward you his Lithograph of Brooches, I suppose has done so, only for a Newspaper proprietor Call on Walsh to see them, and reported them - they would be mine.

RIA Windele MS 4 B 6, pp. 305–310, extract
Piltown 7 May 46
I have not heard since what will be done with Dr. Burgess Collection but should still say the Mechanics Institute will get a preference - and so it ought but if otherwise I will not lose sight of the monster brooch.

RIA Windele MS 4 B 6, pp. 345–348, extract
Piltown 13 May 46
Yes poor Dr. Burgess died young - and had he lived to a fair age would have had an immense collection as it is his progress was surprizing. I should say the M. Institute there\textsuperscript{12} will possess it & right.

RIA Windele MS 4 B 6, p. 373, extract
Piltown 21 May 46
Poor Dr. Burgess's Collection packed up for Dublin - I suppose offered to the RIA. So I will lose the Monster fibula but if sold separately in Dublin I will look out.

RIA Windele MS 4 B 6, pp. 411–412, extract
Piltown 2 June 46
The antiquities of the late Dr. Burgess has gone to Dublin & Can't find out what has been done with them, though I had written to Mr. Perry (to whom I sold caterpillar)\textsuperscript{13} whom has I am informed the management of them. Yet he did not reply to my letter. I judge the Academy may get them - or the two brothers Perrys\textsuperscript{14} may retain them. At all events I've now no chance of the monster fibula. If anything rare turns up again I have the market to myself, - but many a long day will pass over before anything like those brooches will appear - had Dr. Burgess lived I may have had a chance of his?

RIA Windele MS 4 B 6, pp. 563–568, extract
Piltown 11 August 46
I ....... would be also glad that institution [i.e. the Royal Irish Academy] had the Monster Brooch - but no, its brought with Burgess's Collection to Wales by the Widow whom, I am informed retains all dureing life.

\textsuperscript{12}The Mechanics Institute, Clonmel.
\textsuperscript{13}This refers to an amulet in the shape of a caterpillar or larva of the Hawk Moth, supposed to have been used as a charm against the murrain caterpillar believed to be injurious to cattle. The amulet sold to Perry, found at Doneraile, Co. Cork, is now in the National Museum of Ireland. See M. Cahill, 'Mr. Anthony's Bog Oak Case', p. 66, fn. 20.
\textsuperscript{14}William Perry and his brother John, a noted collector of geological specimens.
At this point the correspondence on the brooches finished as Redmond Anthony had other objects to pursue for his collection. Both items disappear from view until their respective acquisition by the Royal Irish Academy.

The Minutes of the Royal Irish Academy's Antiquities Committee record the decision to acquire Dr. Burgess' brooch as follows:

29th October 1874

The Secretary of the Committee having stated that he had provisionally purchased for the Academy during the vacation a silver fibula of extraordinary length (23 1/2 inches) offered by Mrs. Allen (whose letters in reference to it were read).

Resolved

That the purchase of the fibula from Mrs. Allen for £15 be approved of, and that the Treasurer be authorised to pay that amount out of the Treasury Trove fund.

Unfortunately Mrs. Allen's correspondence on the matter which might have outlined the brooch's whereabouts between 1846 and 1874 cannot now be traced.

The register of the Academy records further particulars relating to the acquisition of the brooch as follows:

1874:73 Length of Pin 20 1/8in. Wt. 5oz 4dwt 15grs
Said to have been found in Co. Kilkenny. Particulars of finding not yet obtained from Mr. Perry, the owner of a similar object found at the same time and place.

Purch. from Mrs. Allen, 6 Sheen Villas, Park Road, Richmond, Surrey, England for £15.0.0. October

The brooch was apparently taken with the rest of the Burgess collection to Wales by his widow. Anthony remarked that if he had lived, Dr. Burgess would have amassed a considerable collection. Very little is known of Dr. Burgess and his collecting activities. On one occasion (2nd January 1843) he wrote to George Petrie to tell him of a small gold sleeve-fastener which he had acquired. He offered it to Petrie for the cost price of £3. The weight is recorded as about nine pennyweights, but the provenance of this object is not noted although there is a rough sketch of it (NLI MS 790.98). He told George Petrie that he had not made any additions to his collection for about a year and intimated that the demands of a young family left him with little cash to expend on antiquities.

The second brooch was acquired from the widow of William Perry in 1881. The Perry collection amounted to over 530 objects and included a wide range of material from Bronze Age gold to the Romano-British artifacts from the Stoneyford, Co. Kilkenny, burial and objects from the Viking cemetery at Islandbridge, Dublin. Although he had a large collection, William Perry is not well known (see A. Ireland, this volume, pp. 83–86) and does not seem to have moved in antiquarian circles. The register entry for his brooch is as follows:


This is probably the brooch said to have been found in Co. Kilkenny with the one numbered in Registry 1874:73.

**COMMENT**

The two brooches discussed in the foregoing correspondence are the largest surviving examples of kite brooches. The summary descriptions which follow are intended as a guide to the main features. Detailed accounts of both are included in the corpus of kite brooches by Oma Somerville and Niamh Whitfield.

---


Both are made from cast and beaten silver and consist of a pendant pin-head attached by means of a double hinged tab to a long pin. The smaller of the two (NMI 1874:73; Illus. 3) has a lozenge-shaped head with animal heads at three of the angles. The pendant is pierced by a roughly heart-shaped opening. The surface of the pin-head is decorated with an engraved interlace pattern emphasised by dotting. The underside of the pendant is fitted with a small fastening ring. The pin is round in section for the upper third of its length; the remainder is octagonal in section. The facets are decorated with incised lines running longitudinally. The length of the pin is 51.3cm.

Illus. 3. (Left) Head of smaller silver kite brooch from near Limerick City. (Photo: Nat. Mus. Ireland) 
Illus. 4. (Right) Head of larger silver kite brooch. (Photo: Nat. Mus. Ireland)

The pendant of the larger brooch (NMI 1881:114) is of circular form and resembles the head of an animal (Illus. 4). The triangular settings on either side of the kidney-shaped opening form the ears while the eyes are fixed to the sides of the lower half of the pendant. The settings for the ears are now empty but in Anthony's sketch in his letter to Windele of 26th November 1845 he indicates that each was set with a 'stones'. This is perhaps the most useful piece of information on the condition of the brooches when found as these 'stones' are now missing. Judging from inlays on contemporary metalwork, the 'stones' could have been of glass, amber, enamel or garnet. However, given that the kite-brooches from Waterford and Clonmacnoise have inlays of blue and red glass respectively, it is likely that the 'stone' of the
settings was glass. The other compartments on the upper surface of the pendant must have been filled with glass or amber and perhaps stamped or filigree panels. This brooch is therefore of more complex construction than the smaller one. It also has a fastening ring on the underside of the pendant. The length of the pin is 56 cm.

It is clear from the correspondence that Redmond Anthony was bitterly disappointed by his failure to secure the kite brooches from Limerick. However, in spite of his loss he did record some important facts concerning the discovery of the brooches. It is certain that they were found together and while the exact find-place is not named it seems that they may have been found during the course of railway construction somewhere in the vicinity of Limerick city. This would appear to be the implication of Redmond Anthony’s remark to John Windele (3/12/45) that ‘100 and odd railways in Ireland may throw up more monster fibulas and plenty of other antiquities’.

Mr. Walsh, the jeweller, is listed in contemporary commercial directories as Thomas Welch, having premises at 23 Patrick St. in 1824, and by 1846 he is listed as Thomas Welch & Co. and had moved to 1 Patrick St.\textsuperscript{17} Thomas Walsh, in common with other nineteenth century jewellers, sold antiquities found locally which came his way. In 1843, for example, he offered for sale to the Royal Irish Academy a gold pin from Carrigaholt, Co. Clare\textsuperscript{18}.

The reference to an advertisement in one of the Limerick newspapers held out the possibility that this advertisement might contain further details of the find-place. The two papers published in Limerick at this time were the Limerick Reporter and the Limerick Chronicle. Regrettably, no reference to the brooches has been identified in either of these newspapers. However, many columns are taken up with official notices concerning the railways which tends to support the opinion that they were found during work on the railways.

The Windele correspondence proves conclusively that the two kite brooches were found together at an unknown location. At the time the find was made, the line from Limerick to Tipperary town was the only line under construction. The Waterford and Limerick Railway Act had been passed on 21 July 1845, and work began on the line towards the end of that year. By early 1846 the work on the first section from Limerick City, via Killonan, Boher, Dromkeen, Pallas and Oola, to what later became Limerick Junction was well under way, and by June of that year had reached Pallas\textsuperscript{19}. We may presume that the find-place was close to Limerick as the brooches were found on or around the 22nd November 1845. A note in the Limerick Reporter of November 4th 1845 indicates that at that time, work was being carried out on the Limerick and Waterford railway “in the fields adjoining the terminus, on the Roxboro’ road”. A report in the Limerick Chronicle for 6th December 1845 on the operations then in progress at the Limerick terminus indicates that work had begun on digging the foundations for the embankments and cuttings in the grounds of the Lunatic Asylum. Comparison of the first edition of the 6-inch scale Ordnance Survey maps with later editions shows no marked field monument which was transected or removed by the construction of the railway line, either at the terminus or along its length as far as Pallas. The problem of locating the find-place is further complicated by the fact that the find may have been made in the course of ancillary work in connection with the construction of the line, such as quarrying stone for use as metalling, and therefore need not necessarily have been found along the line of the railway track itself. Nevertheless, the information available at present suggests that if the brooches were found in the course of work on the construction of the railway line, they were found in an area occupied by the townlands of Priors-land and Spital-land,

\textsuperscript{17}Pigoz and Co.: City of Dublin and Hibernian Provincial Directory, London 1824, p. 288; Slater’s Directory, 1846, p. 275.
\textsuperscript{18}NMI Reg. No. W.284.
approximately 1 km south of the site of the Viking Age town of Limerick. A further comment is also of great interest. Redmond Anthony received from some contact, perhaps William Perry with whom he had previously done business, a lithograph of the two pins. This he referred to as the “scandalous lithograph”. To date it has not been possible to locate a copy of this lithograph. Considering the amount of lithographed material which circulated between collectors at this time it seems extraordinary that this lithograph has not been identified. John Windele regularly bound in as end papers in his volumes of notes and correspondence, copies of many different lithographs which were circulating amongst his antiquarian acquaintances, but he did not include the print of the pins. In his letter to John Windele on 26th Nov. 1845, Redmond Anthony copied the sketches he had received from Mr. Walsh and clearly indicated that there were stones present in the two triangular-shaped settings on the pin-head of the larger brooch. These settings are now empty. The loss of this lithograph which might confirm the existence and form of these settings is all the more unfortunate.

At the same time as the brooches were brought to Mr. Walsh, the jeweller, a large brass candlestick was also “bought in” with them. The letters describe this candlestick as being 14 ins. in height, 10 ins. in breadth at the bottom and 8 ins. at the middle and weighing 41bs. The sketch (Illus. 1) shows an object of possibly late medieval type with a central knop and a widely splayed foot. It seems that this object was not part of the hoard although it may have been found in similar circumstances.

**DISCUSSION**

Before discussing the implications of the reprovenance and hoard context of these brooches it seems appropriate here to record a number of other brooches and pins of silver and gold which have been found in the county.

The first of these is a bossed penannular brooch formerly in the Petrie Collection (NMI Reg. No. P.742) where it was recorded as unprovenanced (Illus. 5). Among the Windele

![Image of a brooch](image)

**Illus. 5. Silver bossed penannular brooch, Kildimo, Co. Limerick. (Photo: Nat. Mus. Ireland)**

---

20 O.S. Limerick 6-inch Sheet 5.
21 M. Cahill, ‘Mr. Anthony’s Bog Oak Case’, pp. 70–71.
22 O.S. Johansen, ‘Bossed Penannular Brooches’, *Acta Archaeologica*, 44 (1973), 63–124, no. E1, Fig. 56.
papers preserved in the Royal Irish Academy (MS 12 M 15, p.199) is a drawing bearing the following legend:-

Antique Silver Brooch found at Kildimo County of Limerick. Wt 3 oz. 2 pwt. Original sketch by Joseph D. Humphreys, J. Windele pinxt. Feb 12th 1838

It is drawn at a scale of 1:1 and matches exactly the brooch in the Petrie Collection in size, decoration and weight. The original version of Windle’s drawing is found in a letter from John D. Humphreys (who was appointed librarian of the Royal Cork Institution in 1840) to Thomas Crofton Croker.

Cork Jan. 25th 1820

Dear Crofton Croker

I was in Limerick when thy last letter was forwarded to me and actually employed in copying the annexed Antique as W Fitzgerald, the Silversmith, did not seem inclined to part with it, but intends to take it to London. The drawing is however very exact in size & in character: except that I have not accurately shaded the circular knobs in the centre of the brooch, so as to make them appear to project from the rest of the [surface?] as much as they really do. They are separate pieces of Silver, rivetted at the back. The little squares also project in a small degree but are part of the brooch & not fastened in. The whole is in excellent Preservation.

The drawing (Illus. 6) is captioned ‘Antique Broche of Silver, found at Kildimo, Co. Limerick. Wt. 3 oz. 2 pwt’s’. Unfortunately it is not stated whether the find was from Old or New Kildimo, two villages situated some 1.5km apart.

A gold brooch-pin (Illus. 7), found at Killfinnane ‘Abbey’, Co. Limerick, before 1852 has recently been acquired by the National Museum of Ireland (Reg. No. 1992:53) and has been published elsewhere. It is of interest not only because of its probable ninth century date but because it is one of only two gold pre-twelfth century brooches from Ireland.

A silver thistle brooch from Ballynolan, Co. Limerick, is preserved in the Cambridge University Museum (Reg. No. 1955.128). Although illustrated by Henry and listed by Graham-Campbell, it has received little attention in the

---

We would like to thank Mrs. Joan Rockley for drawing our attention to this letter.

literature and both faces are illustrated here for the first time (Illus. 8). According to the card catalogue of the Cambridge University Museum, it was found about the 6th of April 1836 by John Kennedy "who was employed in rooting up stones near Ballynolan, and, in turning up a stone of considerable size, discovered the brooch about two feet and a half under ground".

The reference to its discovery under a stone is of interest as there are other accounts of Viking Age silver artifacts being discovered under stones. The pin measures 19.0 cm in length, the hoop measures 6.7 cm at it widest point and the brooch weighs 145g. The brooch is an early type, similar in size to that from the Ardagh Hoard although the terminals and pinhead are more developed, possibly indicating a slightly later date.

Two early accounts which refer to this find are of interest, not least for the differing accounts of the object's discovery. The first is to be found in Lewis' Topographical Dictionary of Ireland:

In a quarry near the town [Pallaskenry, Co. Limerick, which is immediately adjacent to Ballynolan] was found an ancient silver bodkin, weighing 5oz. 2dr., now in the possession of Sir Aubrey de Vere, Bart.

The metric equivalent of the weight given is 148.5g which is sufficiently close to the brooch in Cambridge to leave little doubt but that they are the same.

The second is contained in the journal of Lady Chatterton’s tour of Ireland in 1838 which records:-

Mr. A- showed me to-day, a beautiful silver ornament, a sort of gigantic clasp, or brooch, which had been dug up at Rathkeale....

The description is accompanied by a drawing of a thistle brooch with terminals and pinhead bearing incised ornament which leaves no doubt that it is the same as that on the reverse of the Ballynolan brooch. Rathkeale, however, lies some 15 km south west of Ballynolan and one can only presume that the Rathkeale provenance was an error on the part of Lady Chatterton, although recorded only two years after its discovery.

Finally, mention must be made of the hoard of objects which included four gilt silver brooches found in 1868 at Ardagh, Co. Limerick. Although some of the brooches in the hoard may be dated early in the ninth century, the latest object is the thistle brooch, a small example with solid terminals which is early in the series and which need date no later than the end of the ninth century and thus may not be far removed in date from the other brooches in the hoard. In the original account of the discovery of the Ardagh Hoard reference is made to a rough flagstone set to one side of the chalice which brings to mind the stone placed over the Ballynolan brooch.
Illus. 8. Silver thistle brooch from Ballynolan, Co. Limerick, front and back views.

(Photo: Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge University)
In total there are, therefore, nine brooches of silver or gold deposited between the later ninth and the mid tenth centuries which can be provenanced to the county: four from the Ardagh Hoard; two kite brooches from ‘near Limerick’; a bossed penannular brooch from Kildimo; a thistle brooch from Ballynohan and a gold brooch-pin from Kilfinnane. To these can be added the tenth century polyhedral-headed silver ringed pin from Adare, Co. Limerick\textsuperscript{33} - a rare example in silver of a type usually made of copper alloy. The Adare pin is both the longest and finest ringed pin on record, measuring over 35cm in length. The pin is now in five pieces and it has been suggested that it may once have formed part of a hoard of hack-silver\textsuperscript{34}.

There are, in addition, some hoards and single finds of silver of Scandinavian character of ninth/tenth century date from Co. Limerick. These consist of a mixed hoard of coins and ingots from Mungret dating to c.953\textsuperscript{35} and a hoard of hack-silver, ingots and a plain ring from the wall of a cashel at Carraig Aille II which should date to between c.880 and c.930–940 on the basis of the presence of fragments of stamped silver arm-rings\textsuperscript{36}. Two Anglo-Saxon silver pennies found during excavation of an enclosure at Site C, Knockadoon, Lough Gur,\textsuperscript{37} and dating to the early tenth century, may represent part of a dispersed hoard. A single find of a broad-band stamped silver arm-ring in the Petrie Collection and ‘procured at Limerick’ may also have been found in the county\textsuperscript{38}. Finally, a hammered gold ingot said to be from Askeaton along with other gold ornaments of Bronze Age date is more likely to date from the Viking Age\textsuperscript{39}. Ingots of gold are rare anywhere in early medieval Europe but there is one gold ingot from Wood Quay, Dublin, which shows similar hammer marks to those on the Askeaton ingot\textsuperscript{40}. Ingots of silver with the same hammered pattern are known from Danish silver hoards dated to the period 950–1000\textsuperscript{41} and a silver ingot exhibiting the same marks is known from an early medieval context from Feltrum Hill, Co. Dublin\textsuperscript{42}.

The origin and dating of kite brooches has recently been discussed elsewhere by both Somerville and Whitfield\textsuperscript{43} and there seems little reason to question the tenth century date proposed by the latter for the two Limerick brooches.

\textsuperscript{33} M. Ryan and M. Cahill, *Irish Gold: 4000 years of personal ornaments from the collections of the National Museum of Ireland* National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne 1988, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{38} Sheehan, ‘Viking-age Silver Arm-ring’, 129, fn. 4.
\textsuperscript{40} National Museum of Ireland Reg. No. EI32:30354. Although found in a thirteenth-fourteenth century context, it may well be earlier. The authors are grateful to Dr P.F. Wallace for drawing their attention to this find. See M. Cahill, ‘Some Unrecorded Bronze Age Gold Ornaments’, pp. 9–11.
\textsuperscript{41} R. Skovmand, ‘De danske skattefund’, *Aarbøger for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* (1942), pp. 1–275. See, for example, ingots from the Tarup (deposited after 971; Fig. 19), Rs (deposited c.970–80; Fig. 26), and Munkegaard (deposited c.1010; Fig. 27) hoards.
\textsuperscript{42} Cahill, ‘Some Unrecorded Bronze Age Gold Ornaments’, illus. 3.
\textsuperscript{43} O. Somerville, ‘Kite-shaped Brooches’ and Whitfield ‘The kite-brooch’.
It is clear that the pair of brooches must be considered to constitute a hoard. Kite brooches are not very common (only twelve are known) and large silver examples are rare. There is only one other example (Illus. 9) which matches the two Limerick brooches in size - an unprovenanced brooch-head in the National Museum of Ireland bearing the register number '3', the history of which is unknown. It is therefore highly unlikely that the brooches represent two separate, unassociated finds made at the same time. Indeed, given the lack of a first-hand account of the find circumstances of the two brooches which came into Walsh's possession, the fact that the two brooches were separated at quite an early date, and the scarcity of brooches of this type, it is even conceivable that the unprovenanced brooch-head numbered '3' may also have formed part of the find. Not only does it compare in size and shape with the larger of the Limerick kite brooches but it also shares with it the fact that its gold filigree ornament is missing. Whitfield has independently linked these three kite brooches, pointing out that "they are the most 'Viking' of all the known kite brooches, for their design incorporates Irish versions of many devices also found on Scandinavian work, broadly dated from the late 9th to second half of the 10th century, many being of 10th-century date". There is, however, no independent evidence to link pin-head '3' with the two brooches in Walsh's possession.

Apart from the Ardagh Hoard which also contained chalices of copper alloy and silver, the Limerick hoard is the only Irish hoard of Viking Age date which is composed exclusively of complete brooches and also represents the only associated find for kite brooches in Ireland. The only other hoard containing silver brooches from Ireland (other than those occurring as pieces of hack-silver) is the pair of mid-ninth century brooches found near the ruins of St Senan's Abbey on Scattery Island, in the Shannon estuary, both of which are missing their pins. The only comparable hoard is that from Newbiggin near Penrith, Cumbria, in England, which comprised up to seven silver bosses penannular and thistle brooches. Some of the latter have pins of exceptional length (over 50cm long), and are thus directly comparable in size with the pins of the Limerick brooches. The exceptional length of the silver ringed pin from Adare has already been noted.

45The kite-brooch*.
and this feature seems to be characteristic of silver ornaments of the tenth century. Developed thistle brooches of the type from Newbiggin do not appear in coin-dated hoards until the mid-tenth century. A similar deposition date for the Limerick kite-brooches is therefore likely.

It is unfortunate that the exact find circumstances of the Limerick kite brooches are not recorded. In fact, of all the silver brooches from the county only in the case of the Ardagh Hoard is the find context known; the objects were concealed under a flagstone in the interior of a ringfort. One may presume that brooches of gold and silver were the prized possessions of their owners and that their deposition was deliberate and does not represent casual loss. It may be further supposed that they were deposited in or beside a settlement site or other feature (such as a burial mound or natural boulder) which would enable them to be recovered with ease. If it is indeed the case that the kite brooches were found in the immediate vicinity of Limerick then it is possible that they were deposited around the middle of the tenth century by Norse settlers living in and around the town. Limerick has been described as "probably the second most powerful [Viking] settlement in Ireland" which, though occupied in the mid-nineteenth century, "became important only in the tenth" with colonies inland at Cashel, Thurles, and in Co. Limerick.

The concentration of Viking Age silver ornaments in the county must reflect this importance; indeed, the brooches from Kildimo and Ballynolan, the pin from Adare and the Mungrat hoard all come from that part of east Limerick which may have lain within the twelfth century cantred of the Limerick Ostmen. North of the Shannon, the Limerick Vikings held the cantred of Tradree from which comes the pin-head of a large silver thistle brooch of the tenth century from a quarry at Clonloghan, near Newmarket-on-Fergus, Co. Clare. Limerick’s position at the mouth of the Shannon would have also controlled the river route inland and the importance of the Shannon in the Viking Age is demonstrated by the number of silver hoards and single finds along its route as well as by the discovery of iron weapons of Viking type - an axehead from the Shannon at Limerick and swords from the Shannon at Cooperhill, Co. Limerick, some 6km downstream from Limerick, and from the River Deel near Askeaton, Co. Limerick.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their thanks to the following institutions for permission to quote from manuscripts in their collections and to publish illustrations: the President and Council of the Royal Irish Academy, the Librarian, Cork City Library, and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge University. We wish to express our personal thanks to Dr. Niamh Whitfield for allowing access to her work on Irish kite brooches prior to publication; to Ms. Joan Rockley, Dept. of Archaeology, University College, Cork, for the reference to the Crofton Croker letter and to Mr. Tom Cassidy and Mr. Ted Glancy for information on Limerick’s railway history.