

How the Ardagh Chalice was unearthed 125 years ago this weekend

By TOM AHERNE

THIS Saturday, September 25, marks the 125th anniversary of the finding of the famous Ardagh Chalice.

The Chalice is the primary object in the whole National Collection housed in the National Museum of Ireland. It is the most distinctively famous object associated with Ireland, in every encyclopaedia in the world you will find a picture of the Chalice and the details of its discovery and its significance in early Christian terms.

It was part of a magnificent hoard found within a ringfort called Reerasta Rath near Ardagh in West Limerick.

It is made up of 354 pieces of



The Ardagh hoard

metal skilfully put together in a priceless work of art. The Chalice is considered by many experts to be the finest example of 8th century metalwork to be found in Europe.

The hoard was found on lands belonging to the Sisters of Mercy, Saint Mary's Convent, Limerick. Mrs. Quinn had rented the fort and some land around it from the Sisters. That September the Quinns were

busy working on the lands thatching hay and corn.

A journeyman came looking for work so they hired him to finish the harvest. His name was Paddy Flanagan. Jim Quinn, the son, and Paddy went out digging potatoes which were planted in the fort.

On the edge of the fort at the western end they struck a flag alongside where a thorn tree was growing. They dug up the flag and the spade struck something metal which transpired to be the bronze chalice. It was smashed by the strike of the spade.

The brooches were then discovered underneath. The Quinns took the hoard to the Parish Priest, Fr. David O'Connor, who sent the chalice and jewellery to Bishop Butler of

Limerick.

Bishop Butler and Lord Dunraven, a keen archaeologist, examined the find and sent the objects to the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin for further examination. The finds were then returned to Bishop Butler who paid Mrs. Quinn £50 for them. He gave the other £50 (of the treasure trove) to Johnson and Donegan Silver-smiths for examining the find.

The Crown claimed the objects under Treasure Trove 1873. Bishop Butler disputed this claim and the matter went to arbitration. He lost the case and the objects were lodged at the Royal Irish Academy in 1874.

They were transferred to the National Museum in 1890. Mrs. Quinn gave £10 to Paddy Flanagan. He was not satisfied and he gave up his religion stating that he had been

wronged by the church and state and the Quinn family.

He only became reconciled on his death bed in the workhouse in Newcastle West. He was buried in the Paupers Graveyard.

He was a poor, illiterate serving man travelling around the country in search of work to keep body and soul together.

Jim Quinn emigrated to Australia in 1872. He was a fluent Irish speaker and well educated. He got a job on the railways and became very well off. He became very well known as the man who found the Ardagh Chalice. He died in Melbourne.

The Chalice has been part of numerous exhibitions down the years in Limerick in 1950 and 1977 in Cork. It has toured the United States

as part of the "Treasures of Early Irish Art" exhibition. The famous Sam Maguire cup is based on the Chalice.

The people of Ardagh are very proud of the Chalice and they intend to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the find in Ardagh community hall this Friday, September 24, at 8.30 p.m.

Ragnall O Floinn, Assistant Keeper of the Irish Antiquities Division of the National Museum of Ireland, will attend and give a detailed talk on the Chalice and the Ardagh hoard find. Prominent local historians will also attend. A replica of the chalice will also be on view by permission of the Hunt Museum in Limerick. All are welcome.

□ Tom Ahern is PRO of Ardagh Development Association.

EDITORIAL

Printed by Leader Print Ltd. Published by Limerick Leader Ltd.,
54 O'Connell Street, Limerick.

The daily

□ THERE are times when one could be forgiven for wishing that city people were prevented by law from

Is Limerick