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# Two Gold Rings from Ardmayle, Co. Tipperary

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## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to publish in detail for the first time a small hoard consisting of two gold objects of Later Bronze Age date found at Ardmayle, near Cashel, Co. Tipperary.\* The earliest reference to this hoard is in the catalogue which accompanied the sale of Robert Day's extensive collection in 1913 (Sotheby 1913). The two rings were sold separately.

They are described as follows in the section dealing with ring money.

- Lot 448     *Another, similar to the last piece; (i.e. a twisted gold earring) a piece has been cut away from one of the two ends, Ardmayle Fort, Cashel, Tipperary; weight 176 grs.*
- Lot 449     *Another, formed as a double coil of quadrangular wire; found with the preceding at Ardmayle Fort, Cashel (similar coils are found in both Scandinavia and Hungary); weight 216 grs.*

The National Museum's annotated copy of the catalogue records that Lot 448 — the twisted gold earring — was purchased by Wheeler on behalf of the Ulster Museum, where it is registered as U.N. 211:1913. Lot 449 — the coiled ring — was purchased by Spinks, the London coin-dealers. Subsequently this ring was purchased by Captain E.G.S. Churchill, Northwick Park, Blockley, Gloucestershire, for his own collection.

In 1959 it came to the attention of Dr. J. Raftery, then Keeper of Irish Antiquities at the National Museum of Ireland. Captain Churchill made the ring available for recording, but was not inclined to part with it at that time.

In 1965 Captain Churchill's collection was sold at auction by Christie's in London. Artefacts of Irish origin included a number of bronze tools and weapons, a gold foil-covered penannular ring of the type known as ring-money, and the coiled gold ring. Regrettably it was possible for the National Museum to purchase only the ring-money. The coiled ring from Ardmayle was purchased by a Mr. Connolly; its present whereabouts are unknown.

The catalogue describes the find-place of the hoard as Ardmayle Fort. In the parish of Ardmayle there are three townlands bearing that name, viz. Ardmayle, Ardmayle East and Ardmayle West. Between them they contain four ringforts. None of these seems to be known as Ardmayle Fort. The substantial *motte* in Ardmayle townland should also be noted.

The discovery of Later Bronze Age artefacts in or near monuments which, generally speaking, date to a much later period is not unusual, and may relate to an earlier use of the same site or to an earlier phase in the development and use of the monument. It is not known how the hoard came to be in Mr. Day's possession. In spite of his extensive writings on many areas of anti-quarian interest, he does not appear to have referred at any stage to the Ardmayle find.

\*par. Ardmayle, bar. Middlethird, O.S. Sheet Nos. 52, 53.



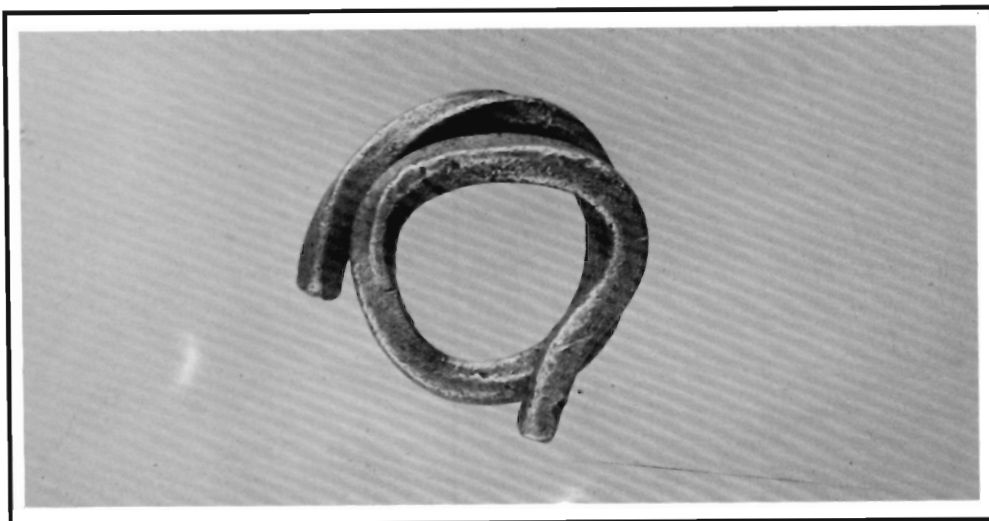


Plate X: Gold Spiral Ring, Ardmayle, Co. Tipperary. (Photo: National Museum of Ireland).

## Description

The National Museum records describe the coiled gold ring as follows:

'Gold ring. Rolled into a single spiral. Made of a bar of rectangular section, the four sides of which are slightly concave. The opening is only roughly circular. External axes 2-3 cm each, internal axes, 1.5 cm by 1.3 cm. Section, 2-5 mm square. Weight 9 dwts (i.e. 14 grammes). Of bright gold. The opening is too small to have fitted a finger'. (See plate x.)

The bar twisted gold ring is an earring made from a bar of circular section. The bar narrows to a point to form one extremity. At the other end the bar has been cut through. This was done at some stage after the twisting has been completed, as the cut can be seen to have sliced through the thread.

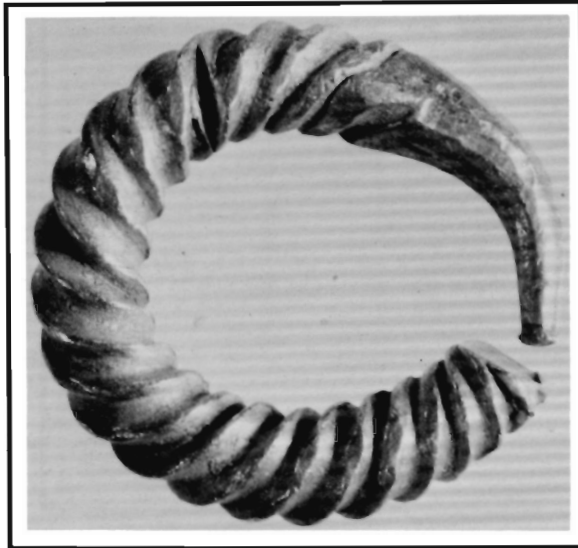
A further attempt to cut the ring can be seen on the other side. In its present reduced and somewhat distorted condition the earring measures 2.93 x 2.00 cm. The diameter of the bar at the cut-off point is 4mm. it weighs 11.42 grammes. (See plate y.)

## Discussion

While we have to rely on Mr. Day's word that the two rings were found together at Ardmayle and so constitute a hoard, there is no reason to doubt the occurrence together of these two types of ornament. Both plain spiral rings and bar-twisted rings are well known amongst the ornaments of the early part of the Later Bronze Age in Ireland, Britain and France.

For example, a spiral ring and two ribbed rings were found together with a bar torc at Isle of Axholme, Haxey, Lincolnshire (Eogan 1967, 149; Taylor 1980, 83; pl. 39). At Carcassonne in France six bar-twisted earrings were found with a bar torc with recurved terminals (Eogan 1967, 156-7; Eluère 1982, 50).

The ring most comparable to the Ardmayle spiral is an unprovenanced example (NMI Reg. No. W184), weighing 50.2 grammes. Other Irish examples of coiled rings are known from Cappeen, Co. Cork and Donnybrook, Co. Dublin (Armstrong 1933).



**Plate Y: Gold Earring, Ardmayle, Co. Tipperary.** (Photo: Ulster Museum, Belfast).

Bar-twisted earrings of circular section are very well represented at this period, with at least 38 examples known from Ireland. The discovery together of a spiral ring and a bar-twisted earring does not seem to have been recorded previously. Both types are typical of the new gold products of the early Later Bronze age period drawing much of its influence from Europe through the Mediterranean.

Taylor (1980, 156) regards these types, together with ribbed rings and penannular rod bracelets, as dating from the late thirteenth or early twelfth century B.C. In Ireland this corresponds to the Bishopland phase of the Later Bronze Age, a period which is notable for innovative styles in ornaments, tools and weapons. Eogan (1983, 44) notes only one other hoard of this period from Co. Tipperary. It contains two gold bands (NMI Reg Nos. W292, W293) called 'tress-rings'. Neither the place nor the circumstances of discovery have been recorded. The Ardmayle hoard therefore adds to the store of knowledge of this period in Co. Tipperary.

## Acknowledgements

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