



**TIPPERARY HISTORICAL  
JOURNAL 1993**

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**ISSN 0791-0655**

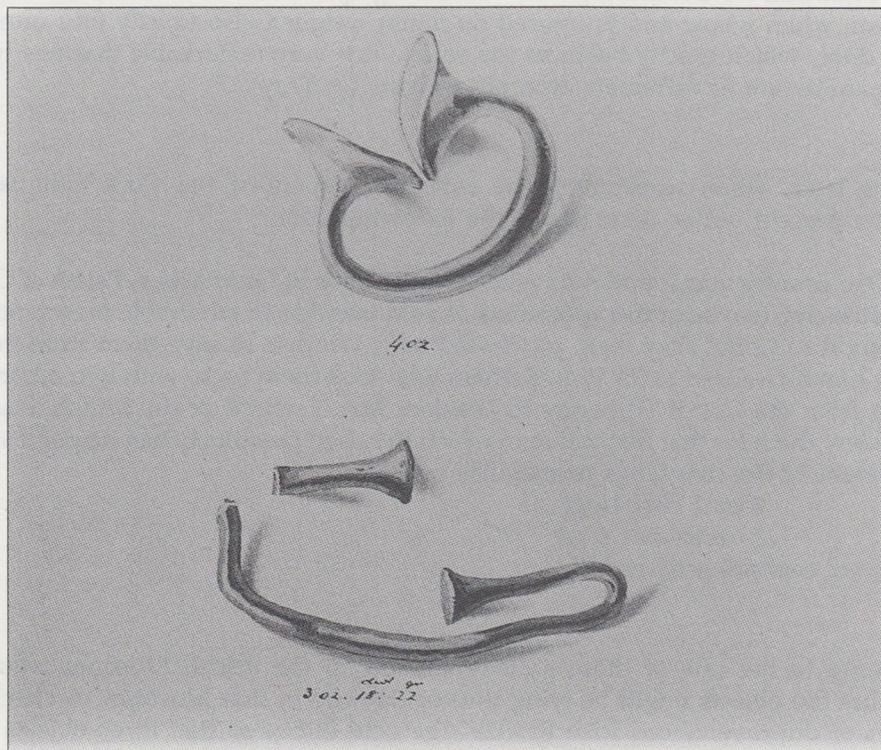
# Two Gold Ornaments from near Tipperary

By Mary Cahill

## Introduction

It is a constant source of frustration for anyone working in the field of Irish antiquities to find that large quantities of artefacts can be provenanced only to "Ireland". The designation "No locality, Ireland" appears on too many museum exhibition labels. This lack of identifiable find-places is, in the majority of cases, due to the fact that the objects were found in the nineteenth century when dealers cared only about realizing the value of the artefact and many collectors cared only about adding a rare or unusual specimen to their cabinet. Possession was the attraction; provenance and find circumstances mattered little.

The problem is even more acute when we look at Irish Bronze Age goldwork. Because of their intrinsic value as bullion, many prehistoric gold artefacts found their way to the melting pot, and the only surviving record of their existence may be a reference or a sketch in an obscure manuscript, journal or auction catalogue. However, we are fortunate that such records do exist



**Plate 1.** Drawing of two gold ornaments from near Tipperary. (Photograph J. Waddell, with the permission of the National Library of Ireland).

in various antiquarian sources such as correspondence, scrapbooks and other records kept by collectors.

The current whereabouts of much of the material described in these sources is unknown, and undoubtedly much of it has been melted down and re-used in Victorian jewellery. In one notorious case strips cut from a Later Bronze Age dress-fastener terminal were used by a Clonmel jeweller (and self-professed dentist) as fillings for teeth (Cahill 1986, 2-4, and Cahill, forthcoming).

Some time ago Dr. John Waddell, Department of Archaeology, University College, Galway, sent me a copy of a watercoloured drawing of two gold bracelets which he had noted in a book of antiquarian drawings. The book had belonged to Sir William Betham and is now in the collections of the National Library of Ireland.<sup>1</sup> I was not familiar with them but undertook to keep an eye out for them.

At that stage the objects could not be identified in any of the published sources on Bronze Age goldwork from Ireland. This note records the identification of one of the objects in the drawing in the hope that the fate of the second may be discovered. Dr. Waddell has very kindly relinquished to me his interest in publishing this material.

The drawing (Pl. 1) is entitled "Two Gold Manillas found near Tipperary, May 1840".<sup>2</sup> Both are of penannular ring form, one complete; the other, broken in two and bent out of shape. The drawing was done at a scale of 1:1. A comment on the drawing reads:

"These manillas were found together in stubbing up the root of an old fir. The lower which is broken when whole and uninjured no doubt weighed also exactly four ounces as the upper does, which exactly balances the scales. It is very remarkable that nearly all these gold manillas are of extremely accurate weights (in Troy)."<sup>3</sup>

Some time later, when researching the extensive papers of the Cork antiquarian John Windele,<sup>4</sup> the present writer came across the following note:

"In 1839 a country man found near a fence on the lands of Gurtnalikey, Parish of Clondrohid near Muskerry two beautiful specimens of gold manillas in admirable preservation which he brought to Cork. They were purchased by J. Windele to save them from the crucible and by him forwarded to Sir Wm. Betham who took them togh. with two others received by him from the Co. of Tipperary to London. Mr. Hawkins of the British Museum was glad to buy them for that Institution in which they had previously had no good specimens. The weight of the two fangs or manillas was

2 oz 1 dwt 16 gr

1 oz 15 dwt 6 gr

They were cast not soldered."<sup>5</sup>

The reference to the sale of these gold ornaments to the British Museum presented the possibility that the objects might be lying unprovenanced in that Museum. A check through Taylor's lists of unprovenanced Irish Bronze Age gold indicated that three objects had been acquired by the British Museum in 1840 (Taylor 1980, 118, 120; Nos. NLI 121, 164 and 165; BM Reg. Nos. 1840. 9-28. 1-3) and narrowed the field of enquiry.

The entry in the British Museum register reads as follows:

"Sept 28 1840    1 Gold Fibula  
                          2 Another  
                          3 Another  
Purch. of Sir Wm. Betham £27.5.6."

Nos. 1 and 2 can be identified as the pair from Gortnalicky, Co. Cork, while No. 3 (Pl. 2) can be identified, by reference to Betham's drawing, as the complete specimen of the pair from near Tipperary. As mentioned previously, the damaged object has not been located. Perhaps the British Museum rejected it because of its condition. It may be that Betham parted with it to another collector or, because of its broken and misshapen condition, it may have been "recycled".

It is also possible that it may have been repaired and restored, something which was regularly done by jewellers without any qualms at that time. This could make recognition more difficult. However, it can be stated that, having physically checked the collections of Irish Bronze Age goldwork in the National Museum of Ireland and the British Museum, it is not identifiable among the unprovenanced bracelets in either of those institutions.

### Description

The surviving object (BM Reg. No. 40.9-28.3) is made from a heavy, solid bar of sub-triangular section. The bar narrows towards the terminals. The terminals, which are large and deeply hollowed, have been made by hammering out the ends of the bar. The rims of the terminals are heavily reinforced by a substantial thickening of their edges. The terminals are now badly scratched and dented.

The object is exceptionally small, given its relatively substantial weight of 4 ozs./124.4 grammes. It is undecorated. This object falls within the group generally referred to as cup-ended ornaments. It is unlikely that it was intended to function as a bracelet in any conventional sense. As the opening is so small, it could not be worn. It could, perhaps, have been intended to function as a small dress-fastener, but the very closely set terminals make this unlikely.

Dimensions: Max. ext. W.	60.55mm	
D. of terminals	(i) 33.00mm × 34.00mm	(ii) 32.00mm × 35.00mm
Max. T of bar	9.85mm	

The other object represented in the Betham notebook was also made from a solid bar and may have been of rectangular or square section. The terminals are slightly expanded and solid. One terminal and a section of the bar approximately 30mm in length have been broken off. The other terminal and a section of the bar c. 35mm in length have been turned inwards towards the inner curve of the bar.

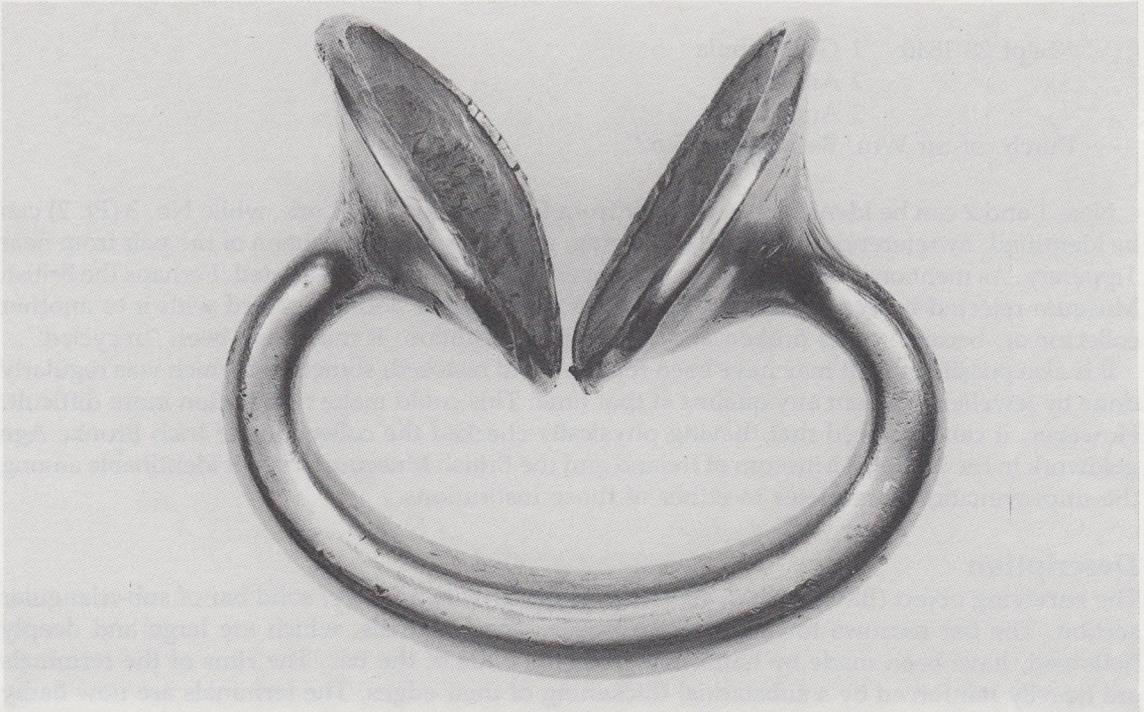
Betham noted its weight on the drawing as 3 ozs 18 dwt 22 gr (122.73 grammes). It appears to be undecorated. Bracelets of this type, with solid slightly expanded terminals, are well represented during the Later Bronze Age.

Dimensions: L. of bar including terminals approx.	185.00mm
D. of terminals approx.	13.00mm

### Conclusion

It is significant that Betham should describe the objects as having been found "near Tipperary", which we can presumably understand to mean near Tipperary town. It is unfortunate that the townland name has not been recorded. At least "near Tipperary" is a more precise location





**Plate 2.** *Gold cup-ended ornament, near Tipperary. (Photograph, copyright British Museum.)*

than, say, "in Tipperary" or "in Co. Tipperary". It is also noteworthy that he describes them as having been "found together", as this implies a hoard.

Co. Tipperary has produced many important gold ornaments ever since the first recorded finds from the Bog of Cullen in the eighteenth century. This small hoard will contribute to our understanding of the distribution of this type of hammered bar goldwork which is such a prominent feature of the Later Bronze Age goldsmith's work in Ireland.

#### Footnotes

1. Sir William Betham, Ulster king-of-arms, was a collector of manuscripts and antiquities. The drawing is contained in a book of illustrations of archaeological material and monuments. NLI MS. 1959 Tx, f. 31.
2. "Manilla" was a word used to describe various types of penannular ring of bracelet form. Bronze and iron manillae were used as a form of currency in parts of Africa. The term was adopted by nineteenth-century antiquarians to signify penannular rings with expanded terminals.
3. Betham was obsessed by the relative weights of all forms of Bronze Age rings, bracelets, ring-money, etc.
4. Royal Irish Academy, Windele Mss. 12 I 7 p. 205.
5. These weights refer to the Co. Cork specimens, which will be the subject of a separate note elsewhere. The modern spelling of the townland name is Gortnalicky. The word "fang" is often used to describe various types of penannular ring. It is a form of the Irish word *faing*, which means a type of coin, i.e. ring-money.

## References

- Cahill, M., 1986: "A Dentist's Dilemma", *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 28, 3-6.
- Cahill, M., forthcoming: "A Gold Dress-fastener from Clohernagh, Co. Tipperary", in Ryan, M. (ed.): *Memorial Volume for J. Raftery*.
- Taylor, J., 1980: *Bronze Age Goldwork of the British Isles* (Cambridge).

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. John Waddell for giving me the opportunity to pursue and publish the elusive subjects of this note and for providing me with his own photograph of the Betham drawing. I would also like to thank Dr. Ian Longworth, Keeper, and Dr. Stuart Needham, Curator, Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities at the British Museum, London, for their kind assistance and for providing Pl. 2, which is published with the permission of the Trustees of the British Museum. I also gratefully acknowledge the permission of the Director of the National Library of Ireland to publish the extract from the Betham manuscript, and that of the President and Council of the Royal Irish Academy to publish the quotation from the Windele manuscript.

