

A Baluster-headed Ringed Pin from Richmond, Nenagh

by Richard O'Brien

Field walking ploughed fields in advance of the N52 Nenagh Bypass Link Road in 1999 revealed a multitude of unstratified artefacts, including a baluster-headed¹ ringed pin from Richmond townland.² Pins of this type are known from Early Medieval sites, mainly ringforts and also from a few urban sites with a significant assemblage recorded from the medieval Dublin excavations. The author believes this may be the first published example of this type of pin from County Tipperary.

For the first time on an Irish road scheme the route was ploughed and systematically walked by a team of archaeologists from Archaeological Development Services Ltd (ADS) in order to locate sites well in advance of construction, thereby reducing delays (Figure 1).³ Thirty-five fields or portions thereof were impacted by the route which stretched from Tullahedy, west of Nenagh to Moyroe, north-east of Nenagh, encompassing the townlands of Grallagh, Solsborough, Belleen Upper, Gortlandroe, Richmond, Coolaholloga and Drummin respectively. Although the route had been fenced prior to survey it was not possible to field walk nine of the fields; twenty-six fields were walked in total. The field walking was done with the agreement of the National Monuments Service and was supervised by the author.⁴

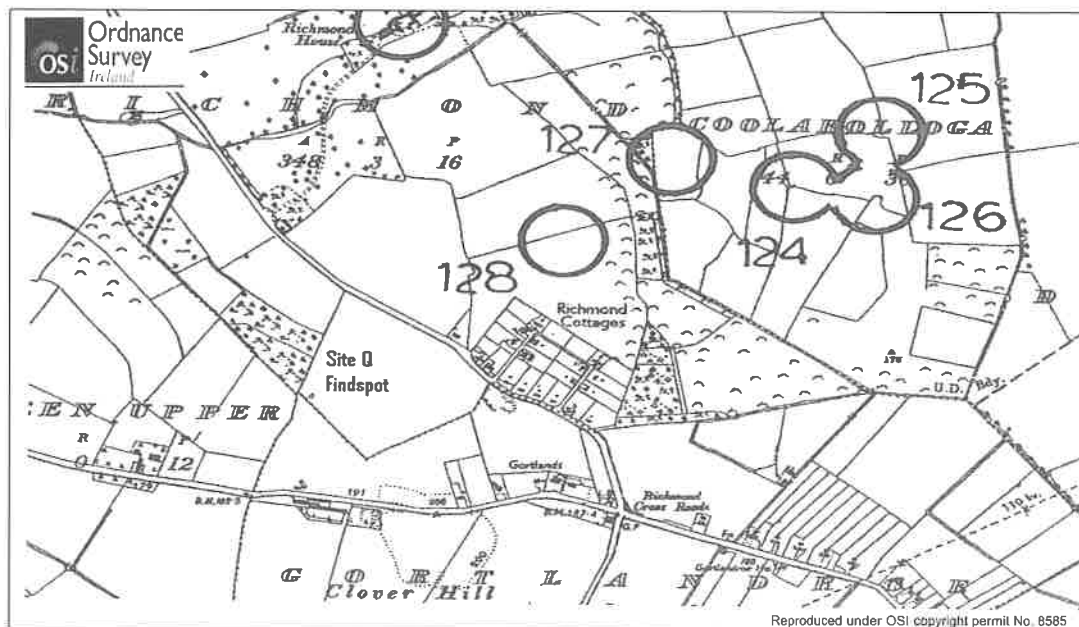


Figure 1: Site Q Findspot (Ordnance Survey six-inch map Tipperary Sheet 20, RMP Detail 1998, based on 3rd edition 1954).

The field walking was divided into two phases. Phase 1 involved walking Fields 1-13 between August 4th–6th, resuming on August 17th–18th after heavy rainfall. Phase 2 involved walking Fields 14–35 between October 26th and November 19th, and rewalking certain fields which had earlier produced dense artefact-scatters. The field walking was done both before and after harrowing on a number of fields. The fields were walked transversely by the team, each member spaced about 2m apart, allowing full coverage of the surface. The finds were picked up and bagged immediately as time constraints did not allow for the more traditional field walking method of using grids and plotting find spots. In summary, 26 potential archaeological sites (A–Z) were discovered consisting of eight burnt stone spreads, seven lithic scatters (flint, stone axes or chert), a possible pre-bog field wall, two possible medieval sites, four possible late medieval sites and four sites of suspect archaeological potential.⁵ The discovery of a baluster-headed ringed pin, in addition to a wide assortment of metal artefacts, represented one of the possible medieval sites.⁶ The ringed pin was found in Richmond townland Site Q during the field walking survey.

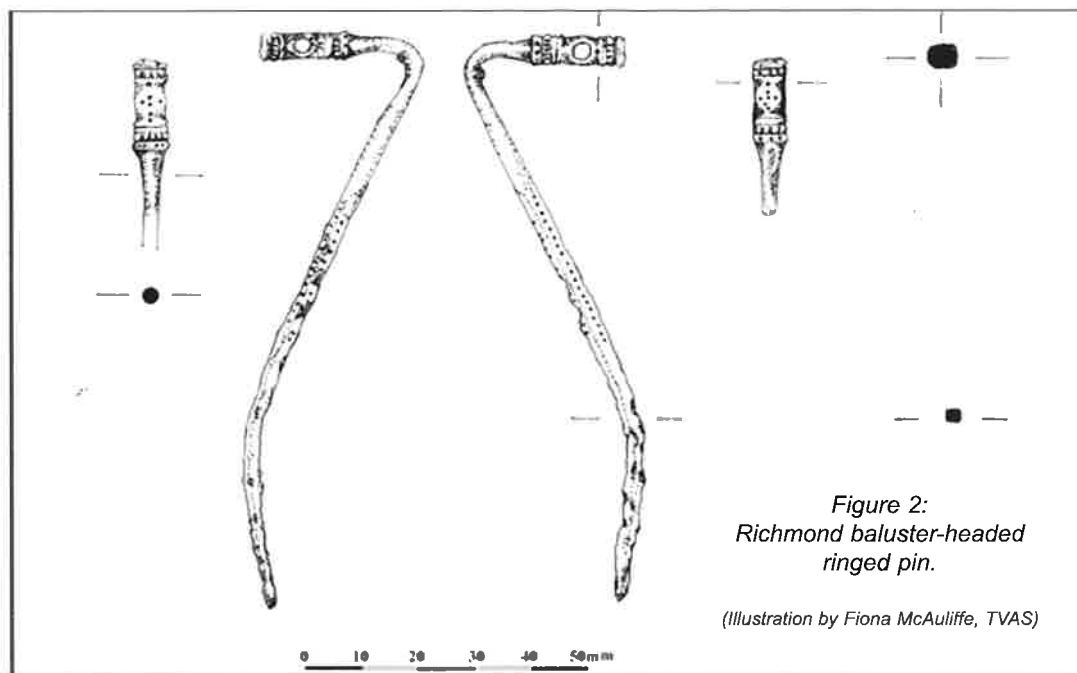
In 2000 Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd (ACS) investigated these potential sites during monitored of topsoil removal along the route and verified that 13 of the 26 sites identified during the field walking represented real archaeological sites. Full archaeological excavation of all sites by ACS subsequently took place well in advance of construction.⁷ Subsequent detailed excavation of Site Q by ACS involved a metal detection survey but this produced only ten fragments of corroded iron,⁸ all of which were relatively modern. Excavation of Site Q revealed a single feature: a subsoil-cut trough measuring 1.6m by 0.08m, containing a 0.20m charcoal fill which dated to 1423–1657 Calibrated AD, firmly in the late medieval period.⁹

Across the local road to the east Site J had been recognised as another burnt stone spread and, interestingly, a pit here was radiocarbon dated to 1265–1424 Calibrated AD, while bone from the adjacent burnt stone spread was radiocarbon dated to 1318–1444 Calibrated AD.¹⁰ Both dates imply a medieval date for the use of the burnt stone technology, which is normally associated with Bronze Age activity.¹¹

Description of the pin (*Figure 2, Plates 1 & 2*)¹²

The late Thomas Fanning's publication of Viking Age ringed pins from the Medieval Dublin Excavations 1962–81 is the definitive work on Irish ringed pins. Ringed pins appear in Ireland as dress accessories in the late fourth or early fifth century AD, with the spiral-ringed (like a modern key-ring) baluster-headed pins being one of the earliest known forms. Plain-ringed baluster-headed pins can appear as early as the eighth century on native Irish sites.¹³

The Richmond pin is made of a copper alloy. It is missing its ring which may have been either of the spiral or plain ring type. The pin is curved both at the neck and near the tip undoubtedly due to repeatedly being ploughed over for centuries; originally it would have measured 135mm in length. The tip measures 2mm wide and 1mm thick at its narrowest while the pin is 2–3mm wide along the shaft. The baluster head is rectangular, 5mm wide, with lozenge-shaped section on one side. The perforation is 3mm in diameter, and is 5mm from the top of the head.



Decoration

A dot motif running midway along each side of the pin shaft consists of about 18–20 single dots in a roughly linear pattern. The spacing between the dots and their alignment is not executed precisely. The baluster-head is decorated with thin collars above and below the perforation, incised with short lines that run perpendicular to the collars. The neck of the head has a collar containing three dots. On both faces a lozenge surrounds the perforation with the base of the lozenge resting on the uppermost collar. On one face there is a single dot above the lozenge; on the other face the base of the lozenge extends like two legs to stand on the collar. The sides of the head closely resemble the typical cross motif pattern: three dots across with two dots both above and below respectively. This decoration is often found on such pins.¹⁴ Any decoration on the top of the head is now gone due to wear.

Discussion

Spiral-ringed baluster-headed ringed pins are known from a number of ringfort excavations: Garryduff¹⁵ and Lisleagh,¹⁶ both in Co. Cork, the stone fort at Carriag Aille 2, Co. Limerick,¹⁷ and the royal site of Lagóre crannog in Co. Meath¹⁸ to name a few.

A comparable copper alloy baluster-headed ringed pin (ring missing) was recently published from the early medieval (sixth-to-tenth centuries AD) secular cemetery at Knowth Site M, Co. Meath.¹⁹ The Knowth pin was recovered in Cutting I from topsoil overlying one of the lintelled graves on site. It measures 145mm in length (width not given), and has a rectangular head decorated with pi-point or dot motif, and a square cross-section; the shaft of this pin is circular at the base terminating in a sharp point. The decoration above and below the perforation consisted of incised lines and a lozenge on one side only. The Knowth example closely resembles the Richmond pin in size and decoration. Interestingly a bronze

ring of circular profile, measuring 27mm in diameter, is also listed amongst the finds on Site M; could this have belonged to the Knowth baluster-headed pin?²⁰

One copper alloy baluster-headed ringed pin (ring missing) is recorded from urban excavations in Grattan Street in Cork City.²¹ The writer concludes that the pin, although found in an organic layer associated with thirteenth-to-fourteenth century pottery, may have been a residual find, possibly originally associated with St. Finbarr's monastic site.²² The pin measures 0.99mm in length, 6mm in width and 6mm in thickness, being shorter and stouter than the Richmond and Knowth pins. The Cork pin is circular in cross-section, and the head has traces of three grooved collars above and below the perforation. Its hour-glass ring perforation measures 4mm and exhibits clear traces of wear.²³

Eleven examples of the plain-ringed, baluster-headed type were excavated in the Medieval Dublin excavations 1962–81. Of these two are recorded from Christchurch Place (one dating from the mid-eleventh century, the other dating to the first half of the eleventh century), one example from High Street from a tenth-century level, two examples from Winetavern Street from a pre-Norman level, and six examples from Fishamble Street (five from various dates in the tenth-century and one from an eleventh-century level).²⁴

Baluster-headed ringed pins are recorded on a number of recent archaeological excavations.²⁵ Excavations in advance of the South Eastern Motorway at Glebe, Co. Dublin in 2000 revealed a copper ring which the excavator thought may have been from a baluster-headed ringed pin; it was found in the eastern terminal of a ringfort ditch in redeposited bank material.²⁶ As no pin was actually found its designation as a baluster-headed pin may have been a little tentative. In 2001 excavations in Adare Castle, Co. Limerick produced an Early Medieval baluster-headed pin from within the drawbridge pit associated with the castle. As the earliest recorded construction phase of Adare Castle is in the first decades of the thirteenth century the excavator used the pin discovery as supportive evidence for possibly an earlier structure on the site, such as a ringwork or ringfort.²⁷



Plate 1: Richmond baluster-headed ringed pin (Photo Graham Hull, TVAS)

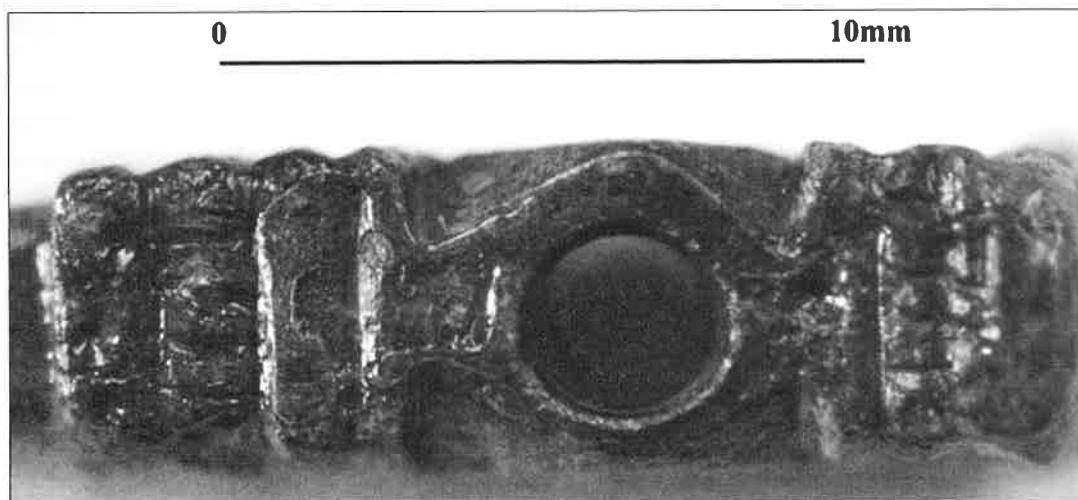


Plate 2: Close up of Richmond baluster-head showing detail of the lozenge-shaped decoration on one face. (Photo Graham Hull, TVAS)

From County Tipperary a copper-alloy pin (ring missing) was excavated recently on a multi-period site in Twomileborris Co. Tipperary.²⁸ It was found in association with an unique bone 'castle-shaped' object and a cache of 53 long-cross silver pennies of either King Edward I or II (early fourteenth-century).²⁹ The recorded pins from the county include two ringed pins and a bronze pin listed in the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) Topographic Files. The ringed pins share the same file number (1956:415) and were listed as being found near Tipperary town.³⁰ A bronze pin is recorded from Ballysheehan, north-east of Cashel (IA 297/53), found in the '*hummocky field with little bumps, like foundations of walls*' near Ballysheehan Motte.³¹ In summary, there are no specific baluster-headed ringed pins listed in the NMI from county Tipperary. However two such pins in the NMI collection from outside the county are similar to the Richmond pin, in having both an ornamental head and dots down the shaft: the first is from Co. Antrim (SA 1927:76) and measures 102mm in length with spiral ring still attached; the second, from Ardagh Co. Limerick (1941:1064), measures 120mm in length with a perforation 5mm in diameter.³²

Conclusion

As the Richmond pin has no ring surviving it could either have been of the plain-ringed or spiral-ringed type, both of which were used as dress fasteners in the Early Medieval period, and were particularly popular by the 8th century AD.³³ Where could the pin have come from? It may have been simply lost by the wearer sometime in the past as they travelled over the Richmond fields from a nearby ringfort. The nearest recorded ringforts are two sites in Coolaholloga townland to the east (classified as enclosures).³⁴ It is possible the pin derives from Site J, located across the local road to the east, although this site produced medieval dates (earliest date is late thirteenth AD). The pits/burnt stone technology at this site could relate to ancillary activity associated with the nearby fortified house (site), now occupied by the ruins of Richmond House, only a few fields northeast of where the pin was found.³⁵ It is also possible that the pin is associated with a site nearby that remains undetected to this day.³⁶

The benefit of systematically walking ploughed fields in order to discover archaeological sites has been long realised and with the discovery of so many new sites on the N52 Nenagh Bypass Link Road, has added greatly to our knowledge of the history of Nenagh and its hinterland. The baluster-headed ringed pin from Richmond townland is an unique discovery for this part of Tipperary, and its publication enhances the artefact record for the county.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Kate Taylor, Graham Hull and the staff in TVAS Ireland Ltd. for so expeditiously drawing and photographing the ringed pin.

References

1. Fanning, T. 1994. *Viking Age Ringed Pins from Dublin, Medieval Dublin Excavations 1962-81*, Ser. B, vol. 4, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy. Fanning defined baluster type as '... a perforated, square-sectioned pin-head form, characterised by a central lozenge-shaped panel delimited above and below by collars or fillets. It is these latter features which distinguish the baluster form' 8, & 15-6 & Tables 1-3.
2. Richmond townland (NGR 18466 18034; Ordnance Survey six-inch map Tipperary Sheet 20 3rd edition 1954), 581mm east, 456mm north, in the parish of Monsea was walked on August 17th and again on October 11th 1999 in advance of the construction of the N52 Nenagh Bypass Link Road.
3. North Tipperary County Council Engineer Ron Gulliver first suggested ploughing and walking the fields in order to locate archaeological sites, considering the significant number of sites found earlier on the N7 Nenagh Bypass itself.
4. The field survey has not yet been assigned a survey number by the National Monuments Service, but for the purpose of this article the ringed pin has been given the finds number 014:01 after the field number it was found in.
5. O'Brien, R. and Hughes, J. 1999. *Field walking on the Nenagh Bypass N52 Link Road 1999*. Unpublished summary report available in DoEHLG archives. pp. 6 & 23
6. O'Brien, R. 1999 *Field walking on the Nenagh Bypass N52 Link Road August 1999*. Unpublished preliminary report available in DoEHLG archives. p. 9
7. Archaeological Excavation Licence Numbers 00E0210-227, 00E0385 & 00E0552.
8. Detection Licence no. 00R019.
9. Murphy, D. and Clarke, L. 2001 *Final Report on Resolution of Archaeological Sites on the Nenagh By-pass Project N52 Link Road*. Unpublished report available in DoEHLG archives. pp. 73-5, fig. 12. C14 Date Lab Code UCD-0114, 1423-1657 AD two sigma.
10. C14 Date Lab Code UCD-0104, 1265-1424 AD two sigma; C14 Date Lab Code UCD-0128, 1318-1444 two sigma AD.
11. Murphy, D. and Clarke, L. 2001 *Final Report on Resolution of Archaeological Sites on the Nenagh By-pass Project N52 Link Road*, Site J. Unpublished report available in DoEHLG archives, figs. 12-6, pp. 40-8. This site is located at NGR 18461 18044; Ordnance Survey six-inch map Tipperary Sheet 20 (3rd edition 1954) 576mm east, 465mm north.
12. My thanks to Susannah Kelly for conserving the pin. Figure 1 was drawn by Fiona McAuliffe. Plates 1 and 2 were taken by Graham Hull, TVAS Ireland Ltd.
13. T. Fanning, *Viking Age Ringed Pins*, pp. 53-4.
14. T. Fanning, *Viking Age Ringed Pins*, p. 11.
15. O'Kelly, M. J. 1962. 'Two Ring-forts at Garryduff, Co. Cork', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 63C, pp. 17-126. fig. 2, numbers 360, 491 and 489.
16. Monk, M. A. 1995 'A tale of two ringforts: Lisleagh I and II', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 100, pp. 105-116. p.107.
17. Ó'Ríordáin, S. P. 1949 'Carraig Aille and the "Spectacles"', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 50-52C, pp. 39-111; fig. 9, nos 371 & 429.

18. Hencken, H. O'N. 1950 'Lagóre Crannog: An Irish Royal Residence of the 7th to 10th Centuries AD' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 53C, fig.14. pp. 1-247.
19. Stout, G. and Stout, M. 2008 *Excavation of an Early Medieval Secular Cemetery at Knowth Site M, County Meath*, Dublin: Wordwell Ltd. Dublin 2008). pp. 63-4 & 115; find no. 242; fig. 30a. Stout also quotes the Lagóre crannog pin (Hencken 'Lagore' p.72, fig.14) when seeking parallels for the Knowth Site M pin.
20. Stout and Stout, *Excavation at Knowth Site M* (n.19 above), pp. 108-9. This bronze pin, find no. 96, was found in topsoil in Layer 2, Cutting B. The excavator said it was part of a ring pin.
21. I would like to thank Marcella Loughman for bringing this reference to my attention.
22. Fanning, T. 2003 'Bronze Ringed Pin from Grattan Street' in R. M. Cleary and M. F. Hurley (eds), *Excavations in Cork City 1984-2000*, Cork: Cork City Council. p. 276; fig. 5.9:1
23. Cleary and Hurley *Excavations in Cork City 1984-2000*, p. 275.
24. Fanning, *Viking Age Ringed Pins*, pp. 68-70, nos DRP63-DRP73, figs 35-39.
25. Available from: www.excavations.ie Summary accounts of archaeological excavations in Ireland from 1970 to 2005 [Accessed 17th March 2009].
26. Seaver. M. 2003 'Site 43, Glebe, Co. Dublin' Available from: www.excavations.ie [Accessed 17th March 2009].
27. Dunne, L. 2002. 'Adare Castle, Adare, Co. Limerick'. Available from: www.excavations.ie [Accessed 17th March 2009].
28. Ó Droma, M. 2008 'Archaeological investigations at Twomileborris, Co. Tipperary' in J. O'Sullivan and M. Stanley (eds) *Roads, Rediscovery and Research*, NRA Monograph Series No. 5, Dublin: National Roads Authority, pp.45-58. This previously unknown site complex was located west of the upstanding towerhouse TN042:05201 and south of the ringfort TN042:05203.
29. Ó Droma, M. 2008 'Found! Ireland's smallest castle', *Seanda* 3, p. 8.
30. National Museum of Ireland Topographical Files, Card Index, Find No.1956:415.
31. Wyse Jackson, R. 1956. 'Mediaeval objects from Ballysheehan', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* 3, pp. 21-2. O'Brien, R. 2007. 'Artefacts from the parish of Boherlahan-Dualla in the National Museum of Ireland', *Boherlahan-Dualla Historical Journal* 10, pp. 87-96. Following his discovery (in early December 1953) of a number of medieval finds following land reclamation works, Wyse Jackson attempted to garner funds to stage a rescue excavation at Ballysheehan and with the support of Professor Ó'Riordáin of the Museum applied for a licence to dig a portion of the site. The Commissioners of Public Works refused his application.
32. My thanks to Dr. Andy Halpin in the NMI for useful comments regarding ringed pins. Until a number is assigned the field walking finds the baluster-headed pin from Richmond is known as 14:01, being the first find from Field 14.
33. T. Fanning, *Viking Age Ringed Pins*, p.16.
34. TN020:144001 & TN020:144002 are listed as enclosures. Available from www.archaeology.ie [Accessed 17th March 2009].
35. Farrelly, J. and O'Brien, C. (compilers) 2000. *Archaeological Inventory of County Tipperary Vol. 1 – North Tipperary*. Dublin: The Stationary Office, pp. 47 & 397. As the original late medieval dwelling is now occupied by the late 18th-century ruins of Richmond House there could well have been earlier settlement on the site.
36. Recorded monuments in Richmond townland number 11: two redundant records TN020:127 & TN020:128, two burnt stone spreads TN020:140 & TN020:141(01), five *fulacht fia* TN020:149, & TN020:151(01-04), a kiln TN020:150, and TN020:30 a fortified house (site). Available from www.archaeology.ie [Accessed 17th March 2009].