

The Ballylongford Brooch



PHOTO: BRYAN RUTLEDGE

OBJECT NAME:	The Ballylongford Brooch
OBJECT TYPE:	7th Century, zoomorphic penannular brooch
FOUND BY:	Mrs Sheila Edgeworth, Mortara, Ballylongford, Co Kerry
YEAR:	2009
LOCATION OF FIND:	Bog in the townland of Tullahennel
ON DISPLAY:	Kerry County Museum, Main Gallery



STORIES SURROUNDING THE DISCOVERY OF artefacts are often as interesting and exciting as the objects themselves. Such was the case when Mrs Sheila Edgeworth of Ballylongford was clearing out the ashes from her solid fuel range one morning in 2009. It was while performing this routine domestic chore that she noticed something stuck in the grating of the range. She retrieved what appeared to be an unusual object; not realising at the time that what she held in her hand was a bronze brooch approximately 1400 years old. The brooch has been burnt in the fire the night before, but miraculously had managed to survive its ordeal relatively intact.

Mrs Edgeworth approached a local archaeologist for advice, who in turn notified Kerry County Museum as the brooch appeared to be of an early medieval date. Helen O'Carroll, the curator of the Kerry County Museum, informed the National Museum of Ireland of the fortuitous discovery after which she went to visit the Edgeworths. The aim of this visit was to meet the Edgeworths; find out and record the circumstances of the find; and to ensure the safety of the brooch. Ms O'Carroll and the Edgeworths agreed that due to security and conservation concerns the brooch should be brought to Kerry County Museum.

Subsequently, in consultation with the

Antiquities Division of the National Museum of Ireland, it was deemed that the brooch would remain in the care, and collection, of Kerry County Museum. Nationally, there are examples from other counties but this is the first of its kind from County Kerry and as such, its significance in a local context may be demonstrated most effectively in Kerry.

Known as a zoomorphic penannular brooch because of the animal head decoration it features, it is a type of brooch that developed in Ireland in the sixth and seventh centuries. However, what makes this particular brooch significant is the fact that it is decorated on its terminals with two Latin crosses, which also form the Chi-Rho monogram.

Shortly after the brooch arrived in Kerry County Museum it was brought to the Conservation Department of the National Museum of Ireland for photography, analysis, cleaning, conservation and advice on ongoing preservation. Most of the blackened surface was left intact as it is part of the history of the object and it will not cause any further harm to the brooch.

Brooches of this type are often inlaid with red enamel, as this example was originally. The enamel was probably lost in the fire, but the scientific analysis of the brooch indicated its original presence, as well as the fact that

the surface of the bronze was originally tinned to give it a silvery appearance.

The Edgeworths received a finders reward in respect of the brooch. This was determined, as is normal practice, by taking into account the intrinsic value and general historical and archaeological importance of the brooch; the circumstances of the finding of the brooch; the amount of the rewards paid in the State in respect of the finding of other comparable objects.

Significantly we can be certain of the provenance of the brooch, as the Edgeworths only burnt turf cut from their own strip of bog in the nearby townland of Tullahennel North. Therefore, it was possible to pinpoint the original location of the brooch, as it had come from the previous season's cuttings.

This brooch forms part of a growing number of zoomorphic penannular brooches, that feature overt Christian symbolism, highlighting the significance that different styles of dress and jewellery may have had during Ireland's conversion period. Indeed, it is conceivable that the brooch may have belonged to a cleric and may have even donated that individual's ecclesiastical office.

The brooch is now on public display, along with other treasures of early medieval Kerry, in KCM's main gallery.