

A Bronze Ringed-Pin from Bishopslough, Newtown, Co. Kilkenny

MARY CAHILL

Earlier this year 1980 while working in his garden at Bishopslough, Newtown, * near Bennettsbridge, Co. Kilkenny, Mr. Séamus Foley found a bronze ringed pin (Plate x), which he kindly donated to the National Museum of Ireland (Reg. No. 1980:85). The pin is of the 'double-ring' or 'key-ring' type, so called because the ring is formed from a piece of wire twisted to form a spiral. The ringed pin is in very good condition although the pin, itself, is no longer straight and the tip of the pin is blunted. The pin measures 10.8 cm. in length and varies from 0.39 cm. in diameter, at a point just below the pin-head, to 0.17 cm. at the tip. Unlike many ringed pins there is no central swelling of the pin. The pin-head is square in section — the type described by Fanning as 'baulster' and is decorated by two horizontal grooves, one on either side of the perforation. The piece of wire forming the ring is 8.7 cm. in length and 0.2 cm. thick. The external diameter of the ring is 2.04 cm. The ring is plain and undecorated and shows evidence of wear. In many examples of this type the ring is decorated with a series of grooves which give the ring a milled appearance (O'Kelly, 1962-'64; Dunlevy, 1969).

Ringed pins are among the most common finds from Early Christian habitation sites such as ringforts and crannógs. Their purpose was to fasten a garment such as a 'brat' or cloak in the same way as the more elaborate penannular and pseudo-pennannular brooches were used. Many variations of ring and pin-head are known (Fanning 1969 and 1974-'75). The 'key-ring' type has been found during excavations at Lagore, Co. Meath, Carraig Aille II, Co. Limerick and Garryduff, Co. Cork. The evidence from these sites would suggest that this type of pin dates from the sixth century and continued in use up to the eighth century. There is no evidence to suggest that the pin from Bishopslough - Newtown was associated with any site or structure and we can only presume that it was lost by some traveller.

References:

- Dunlevy, Máiread 1968 'A Bronze Ring-Pin from Limerick', *N.M.A.J.* XI, 1968, 75.
- Fanning, Thomas 1969 'The Bronze Ringed-Pins in the Limerick City Museum', *N.M.A.J.*, XII, 1969, 6-11.
- O'Kelly, M. J. 1962-64 'Two Ring-Forts at Garryduff, Co. Cork', *P.R.I.A.*, 63C, 1962-64, 17-128.
- * 6" O.S. Sheet No. 24. Td. Bishopslough, Newtown, Par. Tullaherin, Bar. Gowran, Co. Kilkenny.