

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The Irish Viking Graves Project

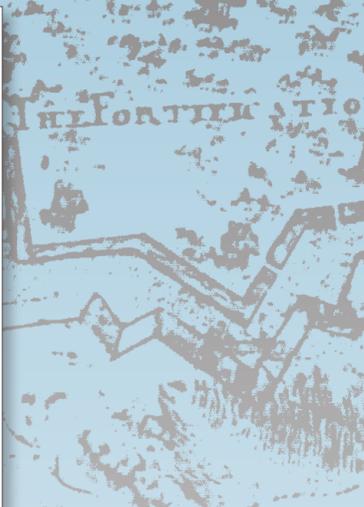
The Irish Viking Graves Project (hereafter 'the project') owes its origins to discussions associated with a conference entitled 'Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age', which was held at Dublin Castle in October 1995 (Clarke *et al.* 1998). On that occasion a number of lacunae in the Irish archaeological record for this period were identified, foremost being the limited understanding of Ireland's extensive collection of Viking Age grave-goods. Work on the project began in 1999 with the appointment of Stephen H. Harrison as Research Assistant (later Researcher) under the direction of Ragnhild Ó Floinn. Initially funded by the Heritage Council through the Royal Irish Academy, the project was later funded by the National Museum of Ireland (hereafter the NMI), which had hosted it from the beginning. The project's first phase ran from July 1999 to April 2001, and the second phase from January and August 2005. The results were collated between September 2008 and August 2009, with final modifications to the text made in 2011–12.

The project's primary aim was to produce the first accurate and comprehensive catalogue of Viking graves and grave-goods from Ireland. Although it was widely acknowledged that these furnished graves, particularly those found at Kilmainham and Islandbridge, Dublin, formed an important source of evidence for ninth-century Scandinavian activity in Ireland, it was generally accepted that all previous assessments of this material were deeply flawed. Johannes Boe's *Norse antiquities in Ireland* (1940) was an astonishing achievement for its time, but it contains many errors, ranging from incorrect registration numbers to inaccurate provenances, despite the fact that Boe effectively side-stepped the issue of provenance as far as possible (see 1.8). George Coffey and E.C.R. Armstrong's earlier study of 'Scandinavian objects found at Island-Bridge and Kilmainham' (1910)—the first attempt to produce a systematic list of finds from this burial complex—also contains a number of significant errors, almost all of which were repeated by Boe, who effectively simplified their account of the sites. Much of Coffey and Armstrong's information was in turn derived from the work of William Wakeman, who compiled his 'Catalogue—specimens in the collection of the Royal Irish Academy' (hereafter Wakeman's 'Catalogue') for the Dublin Museum of Science and Art (the forerunner of the NMI). This reached galley-proof stage in 1894 but was never published. Although the registration numbers that Wakeman assigned to objects remain central to the organisation of the NMI's nineteenth-century collections, his provenances were not always accurate, particularly where Kilmainham and Islandbridge were concerned (see 2.12). Nonetheless, Wakeman's unpublished 'Catalogue' has shaped all subsequent studies of Irish Viking graves, including the recent work of E. O'Brien (1998a; 1998b). At the same time, the efforts of Coffey and Armstrong, Boe, O'Brien and others to reconcile Wakeman's 'Catalogue' with older records have resulted in both the perpetuation of old misunderstandings and the introduction of new errors.

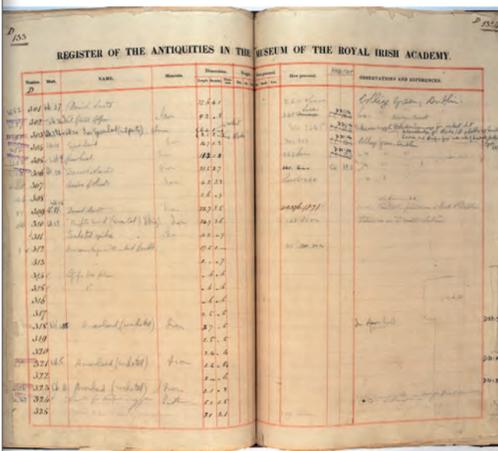
1.2 Problems with the archival evidence

Some idea of the confused state of the archive can be gained from the following problems, which represent no more than a sample of the difficulties facing the modern researcher when this project began. For Kilmainham–Islandbridge, it was impossible to state precisely how many artefacts had been found at the site, let alone how many graves they represented. Even in the case of relatively rare artefacts such as oval brooches, the surviving records contradicted each other: for example, William Wilde (1866, 21) stated that four specimens had been found at Islandbridge in 1866, but Coffey and Armstrong's (1910, 119) account of the same discovery referred to four *pairs* of brooches. The records for more common artefacts such as swords, spearheads and shield bosses were even more ambiguous. Coffey and Armstrong (1910, 111) listed 28 complete swords and several fragments from Islandbridge and Kilmainham, yet Boe's (1940, 12–25) tally

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Chapter 2—The Royal Irish Academy and National Museum of Ireland archives



Ill. 22 (above) Page from the 'Old Register'. Part of the College Green 1819 assemblage is listed as D301–D307. NMI archive.

Ill. 23 (right) Original labels, Royal Irish Academy/National Museum of Ireland. 'Old Register' label (top left; 1); Wilde label (all catalogues, published and unpublished) (top middle; 2); 'New Register' ('Old Sequence') label (top right; 3); 'New Register' ('New Sequence') label (bottom left; 4); Wakeman 'Catalogue' label (bottom middle; 5); 'round tag' label (bottom right; 6).



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Viking graves and grave-goods in Ireland

swords with decorated hilts and five-lobed pommels—was relatively rare in Norway. Petersen recorded just thirteen examples in 1919, spread throughout the country. As he pointed out at the time, the type was not originally Scandinavian but rather Carolingian, with production concentrated in the Rhineland. Müller-Wille (1982) confirmed many of Petersen's suggestions and identified examples of the type across northern Continental Europe, including a surprising concentration in the former Yugoslavia. Charlotte Blindheim (1999a, 77–8), who also confined her definition of Type K to the decorated 'prestige swords' (*praktisverd*), recorded one example from Kaupang and noted that although there was a single sword of the type from Scotland, none were known from Anglo-Saxon England. Recently, Pentz (2010) has isolated a subgroup of some ten Type K swords characterised by well-made hilts with Carolingian vine-scroll decoration on the pommel and crossguard. In addition to the remarkable sword from the boat chamber grave at Hedby, the group includes three Irish examples, two from Kilmainham (D349 and NMD 10506) and one from Ballinderry Crannog No. 1. One elaborately decorated Irish Type K sword, from the Murragh, Co. Wicklow (SA1909:31; Ill. 41), falls outside this pattern. Pentz (*ibid.*, 146) also considers the identification of these richly decorated swords as prestige weapons as 'hardly justified' and is instead inclined to view them as 'swords of the upper warrior class'.

Type K hilts are thought to have developed in the Rhineland in the eighth century but do not seem to have been introduced to Norway until the first half of the ninth, with most of the datable examples there having been deposited in the second half of the century. Recent research continues to support this date range (Jones 2002, 19; Pentz 2010, 125), which would be entirely in keeping with that of the Kilmainham–Islandbridge burial complex (see 3.7).

The plant- and vine-scroll decoration on the Kilmainham sword is almost identical to that on the better-preserved sword from Ballinderry Crannog No. 1 (Peirce 2002, 63–5). The two are of almost identical dimensions, although the lobes of the pommel on the latter are less pronounced. Like the Kilmainham sword inscribed HARTOLF[R], that from Ballinderry also bears an inscription on the upper face of the guard, in this case



Chapter 5—Catalogue

similar size from Eia, Norway—is a single find from a burial mound and presumably also a grave find (Wamers 1985, Taf. 30:3). The elaborate silver brooch-pin from Westness, Orkney, likewise came from a burial (Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998, 136). Thus, if the Kilmainham provenance is genuine, it is difficult to argue that the brooch was a stray find, and it is more likely from a grave, given the discovery of burials there from the later eighth century onward.

Location

It is uncertain how much reliance is to be placed on the Kilmainham provenance, first recorded by Waterhouse & Co. 64 years after the brooch was first published. There is no reason, however, why an association with a site as little known as Kilmainham would have been invented, and the discovery of a sword (see Kilmainham c. 1785B; 5.2.2) at Bully's Acre, Kilmainham around the same time in the late eighteenth century and also associated with the Knights Templar, may indicate that both were found in the same area.

Brooch, Dawson 1777.5 [D390; W45]

Boe 1940, not included
Ils 2, 173

Silver; penannular
L (pin) 14.3 (broken) D (hoop) 9.67 Wt 154.8g

Silver penannular brooch consisting of the hoop and incomplete pin. The tip of the pin is missing. A modern band of plain silver is soldered to the back of what remains of the original pin-head. The hoop is complete but broken in three places, the fragments being soldered together. Three of six filigree panels on the hoop are missing, as are most of the glass settings. The condition of the brooch is much the same today as it was when illustrated by Walker in 1788 (Ill. 2).

The penannular hoop is of flattened cross-section with raised borders and broad flanges of plain silver. It is divided into sunken cells containing panels of gold filigree decorated with scrolls of twisted wire within a twisted-wire border. These are separated by rectangular cells, now empty. At the centre of the hoop is a cartouche with a raised rim bounded by lunate-shaped cells. It has a central circular setting with a drilled hole in the base, flanked by panels of filigree interlace symmetrically arranged. Lunate-shaped cells define the junction between hoop and terminal, flanked by backward-looking beasts shown in profile, their heads on the outer rim and fish-like tails on the inner.

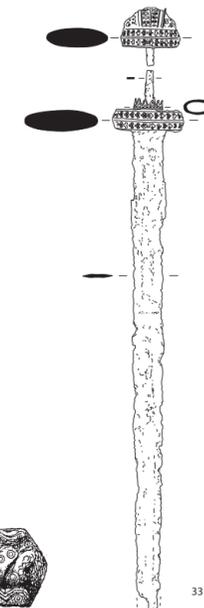
The four-lobed terminals surround a raised square boss at the centre. The lobes are bordered by curved, arch-like settings, two of which retain inlays of red glass, with smaller projecting semicircular settings at the centre of each. Large circular settings with drilled holes in their bases occur between each lobe. Each lobe is set with a semicircular panel of gold filigree composed of pairs of opposed scrolls with a roundel between, within a border of twisted wires. The raised bosses are separate silver castings secured to the



Ill. 173 The Kilmainham Brooch (Dawson 1777.5, Kilmainham 1785A).

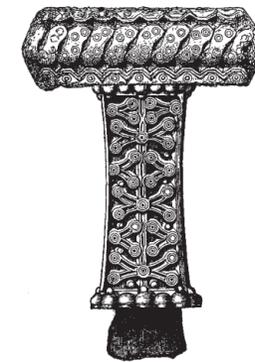
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Chapter 3—Irish Viking grave-goods



Ill. 33 Petersen Type D sword. Double-edged (D354, Kilmainham 1845).

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Ill. 34 Petersen Type D sword hilt (R2390, Islandbridge 1866A). After Wilde (1866, 16), illustrated as no. 2361 [sic].

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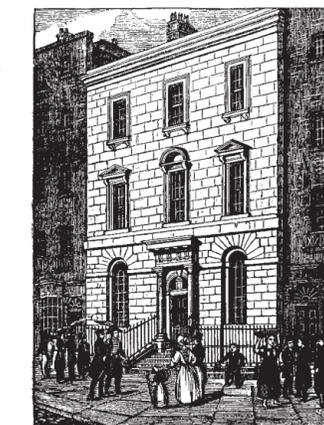


Chapter 2—The Royal Irish Academy and National Museum of Ireland archives

Ill. 9 Portrait of George Petrie. Reproduced by permission of the Royal Irish Academy.



Ill. 10 View of Navigation House, Grafton Street, Dublin, home of the Royal Irish Academy until it moved to Dawson Street in 1852. From Dublin Penny Journal 1835.



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burial complex - now confirmed as by far the largest cemetery of its type in the
Viking west - the monograph also includes details of the Viking graves from
elsewhere in Dublin, and from the rest of Ireland.

Contents:

- Introduction
- The Royal Irish Academy and National Museum of Ireland Archives – A Survey
- Irish Viking Grave-goods – An Introduction
- Irish Viking Graves – An Overview
- Catalogue: Kilmainham; Islandbridge; Burials from other sites in Dublin; Burials from the rest of Ireland
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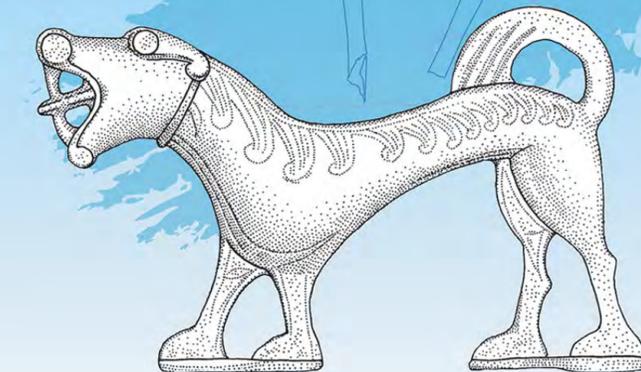
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