

## THE DOWNPATRICK HOARD

Gold was probably the most overt symbol of power and wealth in Late Bronze Age society (1100BC-800BC). Groups, or 'hoards' of gold ornaments are known from several places in Ireland and it is believed that while some may have been deposited or hidden in times of conflict to safeguard them from marauders, the majority were thrown into wet places as offerings to the gods.



Two hoards of Late Bronze Age gold ornaments have been discovered on Cathedral Hill, Downpatrick, County Down. This hoard includes ten bracelets, a fragment of a bracelet and part of a decorated neck-ring. The largest of the ten bracelets has been engraved with a pair of incised lines and three triangles near each terminal. The fragmentary bracelet and neck-ring appear to have been deliberately cut up, possibly for melting down and re-use.



The neck-ring fragment is the most decorated piece in the hoard, with groups of three to four engraved lines around the section with only one face showing the use of engraved chevrons and triangles. It is similar in style to a type of neck-ring found near the Atlantic coasts of Spain and southern France.

Analysis of the gold suggests a possible Spanish origin for the neck-ring and analysis of the bracelets also indicates that they were either imported, or were made of the missing piece of the neck-ring and/or other imported ornaments. This group of material was probably a metalworker's hoard and the reason for it being hidden in a Late Bronze Age settlement is not entirely clear, although, in times of conflict and strife, precious objects were often buried and retrieved later in 'safer' times. Its date is approximately 1100 BC, slightly earlier than the local Irish gold ornament industry represented mainly by the Shannongrove gorget.

A second hoard of gold ornaments was found in 1956 and comprises four undecorated bracelets. This hoard is presently on display in Down County Museum, Downpatrick.

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