

An Armagh warrior enjoyed his pint - 3000 years ago.



Most people living near Armagh are aware that about three kilometres west of the city is a huge circular earthwork popularly known as Navan Fort. Thanks to the work of archaeologists over the last forty years we know that this was an

of Tray, is a great fortress which once had three concentric rings of earthen banks and ditches. This 'hillfort', which now goes by the modern name of Haughey's Fort, has been recently excavated by archaeologists from Queen's University. It was constructed in about 1100 BC - just over three thousand years ago - at the beginning of the period we call the Late Bronze Age. This was a thousand years before Navan Fort was constructed. Haughey's Fort was one of the chief settlements in the north of Ireland at that time, and the surrounding banks and ditches were intended to protect the inhabitants their animals.

social problems. People would have had to defend themselves, and their food and resources, as never before. This protection was provided by hillforts like Haughey's Fort, and by well-armed warriors who would also have roamed the countryside looking for plunder. Soldiers armed with long bronze swords, bronze spears and bronze or leather shields became the new aristocracy, a role they retained long after better times had arrived.

One of those warriors owned not just an Irish-made bronze sword, but also a bowl and a cup from which he drank his beer,



important religious centre (not actually a 'fort') almost a century before the birth of Christ, and five centuries before Patrick brought Christianity to Ulster. Although we have little idea what sort of pagan ceremonies took place there we do know that it later had a central role in the mythical tales of ancient Ireland.

What is less well known is that one kilometre west of Navan Fort, on a hill in the townland

Ireland seems, at that time, to have been a very dangerous place. Some archaeologists have suggested that there had recently been some sort of catastrophic environmental event (perhaps caused by debris from a comet) that had plunged the world into a ten-year-long winter. A collapse in the availability of food, and the movement of people from the cold uplands to the lowlands would have caused huge

or perhaps his mead (an alcoholic drink made from honey). These were not any old wooden or pottery bowl and cup, which anyone could have owned, but were made of bronze. Furthermore they were not Irish-made but had come from the area of Central Europe. It is unlikely that he had personally travelled to those distant lands, though it is possible that a merchant from there had found his way to Ireland. The most likely way that he obtained these vessels is

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that they had been repeatedly passed as gifts through many hands from Germany to France, then to Britain and ultimately to Co. Armagh. Then someone, probably the warrior himself, decided to make an offering to the local god and carefully laid these precious objects in a wet fen, just west of Haughey's Fort, in what is now the townland of Tam-laght. It is likely that the warrior lived at Haughey's Fort.

The water of the fen preserved these three bronze objects - the sword, the bowl and the cup - for three thousand years until they were discovered by Armagh man Sean McGirr in February, 2004. He took them to Armagh County Museum and they are now being conserved and studied in the Ulster Museum. The site of his find was excavated by archaeologists from Queen's University and a few further fragments of the sword and bowls were found. Unfortunately the drying out of the fen and the tillage of its upper levels meant that the objects had suffered much damage - the sword was in several pieces and the cup was in many hundreds of tiny pieces. Whoever had buried the objects had carefully placed the cup into the bowl - and as the cup broke apart the



pieces collected in the stronger bowl. Some of those pieces, before corroding away, had left the impression of the decoration upon them in the soft peat that also settled in the bowl and this impression, which was recorded with the latest scientific equipment in Queen's University, helped us to reconstruct the cup.

We found that the bowl, which was only slightly damaged, was a small plain vessel that had been made in the south-eastern part of what is now Germany. The cup was far more exciting - it was decorated with bosses, punched dots and ribs and had a decorated handle. It was made, probably, in what is now the Czech Republic. Quite incredibly,

although many of these vessels have been found in central Europe none have been found in Britain or, until now, in Ireland. The status of our warrior would have been enhanced by owning, and using, a cup and bowl that had travelled over a thousand kilometres. The final sacrifice of these treasured objects to his god was clearly an act of great piety.

Several hundred years ago the overgrown banks and ditches of Haughey's Fort were apparently known as *Rath Glaise Cuilg* - the 'fort of the sword-stream'. This name is difficult to explain but may imply that other swords had once been uncovered in a nearby stream or bog. There are other possible explanations, and we shall probably never know the true reason for this name, but the recent discovery does support this supposition.

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