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FACULTY OF DESIGN; DEPARTMENT OF CRAFT

The survival of Celtic design and its influence on Irish Metalwork.

From its origins to the present day

by

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INTRODUCTION

Celtic Artwork is one of our greatest inheritances. The Celts arrived in Ireland in 500 to 600 BC and brought with them a comparatively sophisticated structure of government and a knowledge of crafts, in particular metalwork. Throughout the ages Irish metalwork has been greatly influenced by Celtic Art. The Celts have continually inspired artists with their amazing craftsmanship, design and close affinity with nature. Original Celtic design has been continuously imitated and interpreted by Irish metalworkers, leading to successful and unsuccessful results. I am interested in the positive and negative results that Celtic influence has had on Irish metalwork, from the Celtic revival in the late eighteenth Century to present day neo-celtic metalwork.

In chapter one I will look at Celtic Culture and the Ideology that influenced the metalsmiths, and the metalwork that was created. I will also discuss the craftsmanship and attention to detail that was exercised by the original Celtic metalsmiths. Ancient Celtic artists were always driven to create by a greater being. The pre-Christian Celts created to worship the gods and after the arrival of Christianity the Celts became imbued with the idea that the eyes of God would detect errors, and their work became solely to glorify Him.

In chapter two the Celtic revival is discussed. The Celtic Revival origins were political as people searched for their national inheritance. Celtic metal work was revived by groups such as the Fivemilestown school, and the development of the Arts and Crafts society in Ireland. Then in the early 1900's there was the emergence of the individual metalsmiths, concentrating on their craftsmanship, design and the aesthetical qualities of the metal work produced.

Chapter three will consist of Celtic design and its influence on metalwork. I will look at the survival of our most treasured inheritance and its present day integrity. Neo-Celtic metalwork is available to the mass public in craft and souvenir shops, and I would like to look at the Celtic products available to the Consumer. Celtic jewellery has almost saturated

the jewellery market in Ireland. Some Irish metalsmiths seem to be depending on it too heavily for inspiration. Chapter three will also contain a discussion of the Irish trade fair and the jewellery/metalwork that was on show in one of our most important craft showcases. After researching this chapter I found it somewhat disillusioning that so few Irish metalsmiths had found a way of combining Celtic metalwork with their own contemporary designs to create new exciting pieces of jewellery. Those metalsmiths that did manage to fuse both elements of past and present have started to create interesting, stimulating and unusual pieces of contemporary Irish metalwork.

Chapter One

CHAPTER 1

The craftsmanship of the celts has often been described as the "work of angels". When the celts invaded Ireland and settled here in the beginning of the Iron Age 500 bc - A.D. 500, they became the race that most influenced our culture. They introduced their own crafts and techniques as well as their original designs. However they did not ignore our existing metalwork traditions. Even before the celts, Ireland had a strong tradition in metalwork.

The bronze age (jewellery/metalwork) was started around 2000 bc and lasted into 500 bc. These primitive people found jewellery of great importance. It was a way of carrying around their wealth and showing their significance in society so jewellery had a greater importance and function than it does in our modern world. In general Irish bronze age ornamentation is abstract and geometrical, the earliest Irish metalwork being in the form of small disc's from thin sheets of gold. It is thought that gold was plentiful in Ireland in this age. It is more than likely that these ancient Irish people found the Gold in alluvial deposits in river banks and it was probably collected by using simple techniques like panning. The decoration was applied to the thin sheet of gold by hammering the desired shape from the back. This was usually a cross encircled by concentric bands of chevrons or dots. This repousse technique gave way around 1500 BC to incised decorations where the designs were hammered in on the front of the objects. The best examples of this work are the lunulae (which literally means little moon) crescent shaped ornaments probably worn around the neck (fig. 1). The lunulae is a uniquely Irish art form. This object was economical to make, as very little gold was used. The gold was first beaten into very thin delicate wafer like sheets and then repousse was used to decorate the lunulae. Later on in the bronze age around 1200 bc "Torcs" appeared, these showed a development in technique and style. Torc's were made by twisting strips of gold and gold bar together. (fig 2) Torc's are found in loads of different shapes and sizes. The Irish national museum has a good collection of these torc's which shows they were obviously popular. Depending on the size of the torc's they had different functions, small ones were probably used as earrings or bracelets and larger torc's have been thought to have been used to decorate the neck and waist.



Fig 2

"Torc" , 1200BC

National Irish Museum

Later on in the bronze age their seemed to be great development and refining of skills and craftsmanship. A great number of techniques seemed to be explored and advanced. Greater quantities of metal work were found to have been produced in this time . Gold ornament and jewellery seemed to have been more widely worn i.e. dress fasteners, hair rings and highly decorated necklaces e.g. gold gorget, gold collars. Gold foil had been mastered by those craftsmen, the gold foil was used to cover lead bullae, so small amounts of gold could be used to better effect. Filigree was also an important decoration development in this age. Filigree was a delicate manipulation of thread like gold and granules to create intricate decoration in pieces.

The most spectacular bronze age work came with the late bronze age collars and gorgets. These were made out of fine sheet gold. The development in techniques and craftsmanship in this age was astounding and can be evidently seen in these neck ornaments. Sheet gold was hammered into ribs and separated by lines of punched dots or rope mouldings. Each collar was made from a number of separate pieces, the one main sheet piece and two separate disc's which were joined to the main piece by stitching it with gold twisted wire (fig. 5).

The "Gold Collar, Brighter, Co. Derry" shows another development from the gorget above. The design is different and the design has moved away totally from the geometric style, the design is starting to show signs of influence from the celtic La Tene. La Tene is called after a site in Switzerland, where the celts lived for some time. This design work seems to be influenced by stylised classical greek motifs, such as the honeysuckle, and was infiltrated by animal ornamentation of eastern and even persian origins. The patterns on much of the metalwork of the La Tene period in Ireland have been constructed by the ingenious use of compass, creating a mathematically based symmetrical design. This type of design had a long lasting effect on Irish celtic design in Ireland La Tene style flourished in the Iron Age.



Fig 3

"Gold gorget: 500 BC National Irish Museum



Fig 4

"Gold Collar "Broighter, Co Derry

The iron age was the age when metalwork was most influenced by the celts and their culture. Celtic culture was born of Druidic Religion and the oral tradition of celtic people. The celtic artist worked in stone, wood and in particular, metal in a style characterised by its abstract forms, delicacy, brightness of colour and most of all by its spirals and interlacing. Prior to the arrival of christianity to this country, this style was applied to carving stone monuments for magical purposes, such as the aversion of evil and for use in druidic ceremonies. The iron age was greatly influenced by the introduction of christianity to Ireland. By the first dates of the fifth century christianity undoubtedly introduced many new concepts and practices in Ireland. In return this influenced the metal work. Metal work became orientated towards the honour of God. The design work in the illuminated manuscripts i.e. Book of Kells, Book of Durrow were a great influence to intricate designs and filigree found on the metalwork being produced. It is believed the Romans never invaded Ireland, even though a large quantity of Roman objects found their way to Ireland and gave local ancient Irish craftworkers the opportunity to imitate and adapt some of the Roman designs and techniques. Among the most famous and most developed was the Roman Penannular Brooch. The penannular brooch was almost a full circle of bronze with a pin attached. They were used to fasten and decorate garments and proved to be very popular. These brooches were made with the highest craftsmanship. The art of enamelling, which the celts had adapted from the Romans, was used with old celtic designs of spirals and triskeles to decorate these brooches and a new technique called millefiori glass was the fusing of rods of different coloured glass and then when cut the pattern made by the fusing rods could be seen in cross section when placed in the metal terminal of the brooch. These brooches became fashionable in the 5th century and vast quantities seemed to have been made. Several of these brooches can be viewed in the national museum. The Tara Brooch the most famous and most admired of all these brooches was created in the climax of production. The Tara Brooch which was produced in the 8th century, by which time the gap left in the original penannular brooch had been completely closed. (fig. 5)

The Tara Brooch acquired its name by the dealer who owned it in the last century. The brooch is one of the familiar penannular style of a closed ring and a straight pin. It is

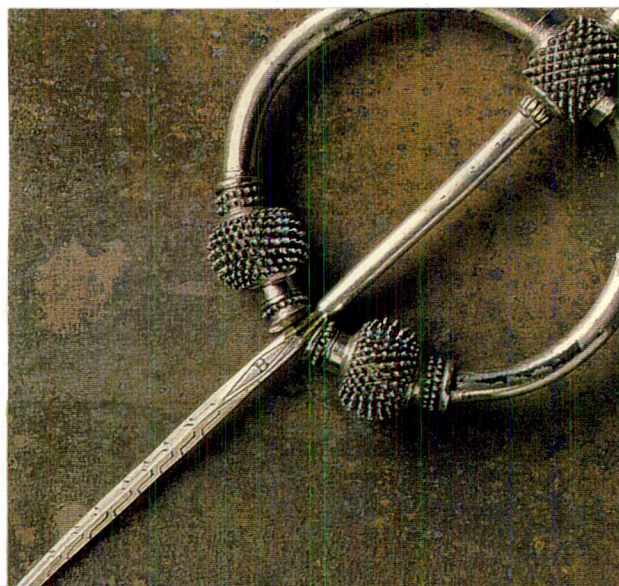
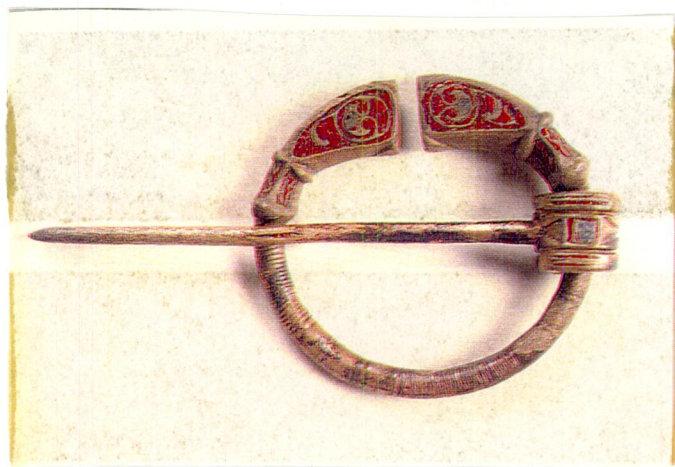
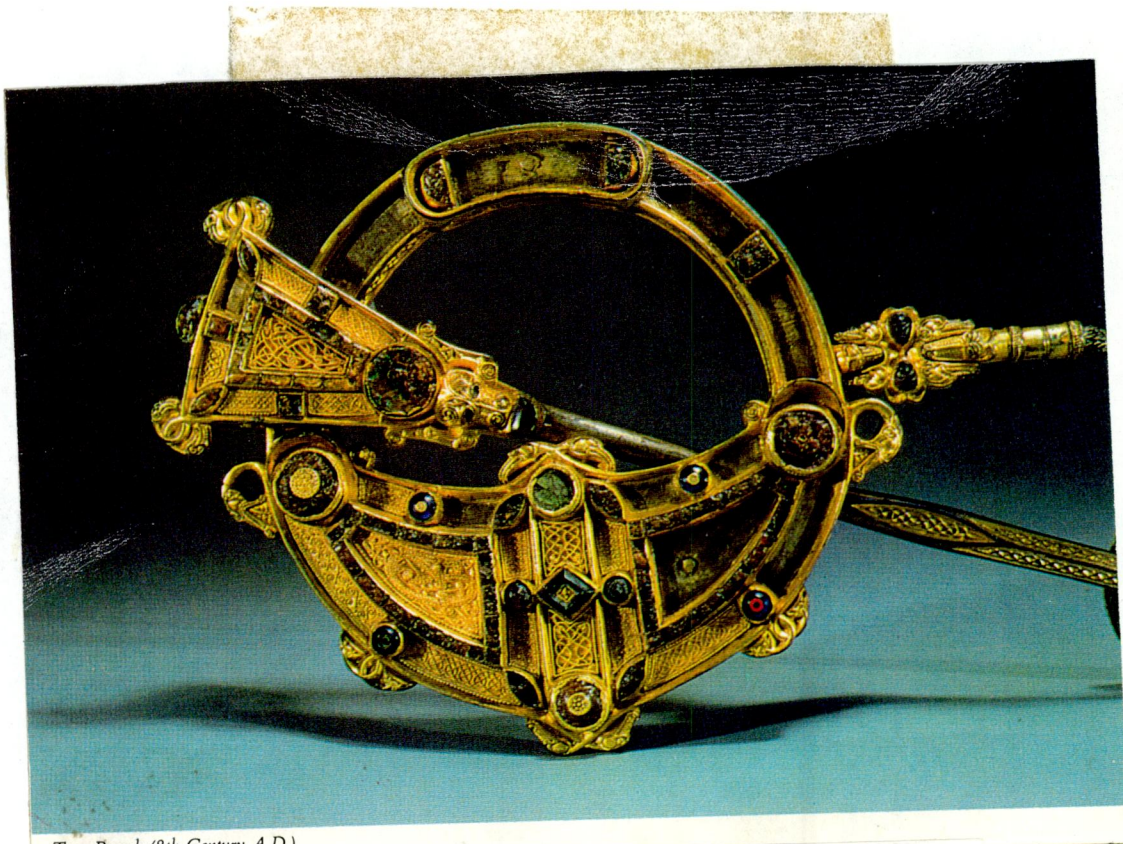


Fig 5

Pennular brooch

National Irish Museum



Tara Brooch (8th Century A.D.).

Fig 6

Tara brooch

National Irish Museum

believed to have been one of a pair attached by a chain of trichinopoly, which has now been broke. The point where the chain attachment joins the main ring of the brooch is beautifully decorated and two small glass studs are modelled in the shape of human heads. The materials used in the brooch are bronze covered on the back with silvered copper and glass studs, and on the front, gold enamel and glass. The panels of the brooch are finally decorated with gold filigree. The brooch head is 9 cm in diameter, yet amazingly into this small area the highly skilled craftsmanship packed the most amazing and wonderful ornamentation. Spirals loops, heads of birds and beasts and fine intertwined gold wire similar to that of the Ardagh Chalice, whose underfoot is superbly decorated, where none but the celebrant could see and appreciate. The back of the Tara Brooch even though it was beautifully decorated could only be seen by the wearer. Many beautiful brooches have been found in Ireland e.g. Roscrea Brooch, silver Penannular brooch Ardagh and Penannular Brooch Ballinderry, but none of these brooches however beautiful can match the workmanship, finesse and beauty of the Tara Brooch. The Tara Brooch was probably worn by a very wealthy high ranking official. The Tara Brooch has to be one of Ireland's finest treasures. (fig. 6)

These brooches have been thought to have been worn with the pins pointing upwards and Irish representations confirm that they were worn by men as well as women. The techniques used and developed in this age are the basis of what is used today.

The design was usually worked out and developed in bone or slate and some trial pieces from this age have been found. It is thought that some could have been patterns or dyes into which gold or silver foils were pressed to reproduce the design directly.

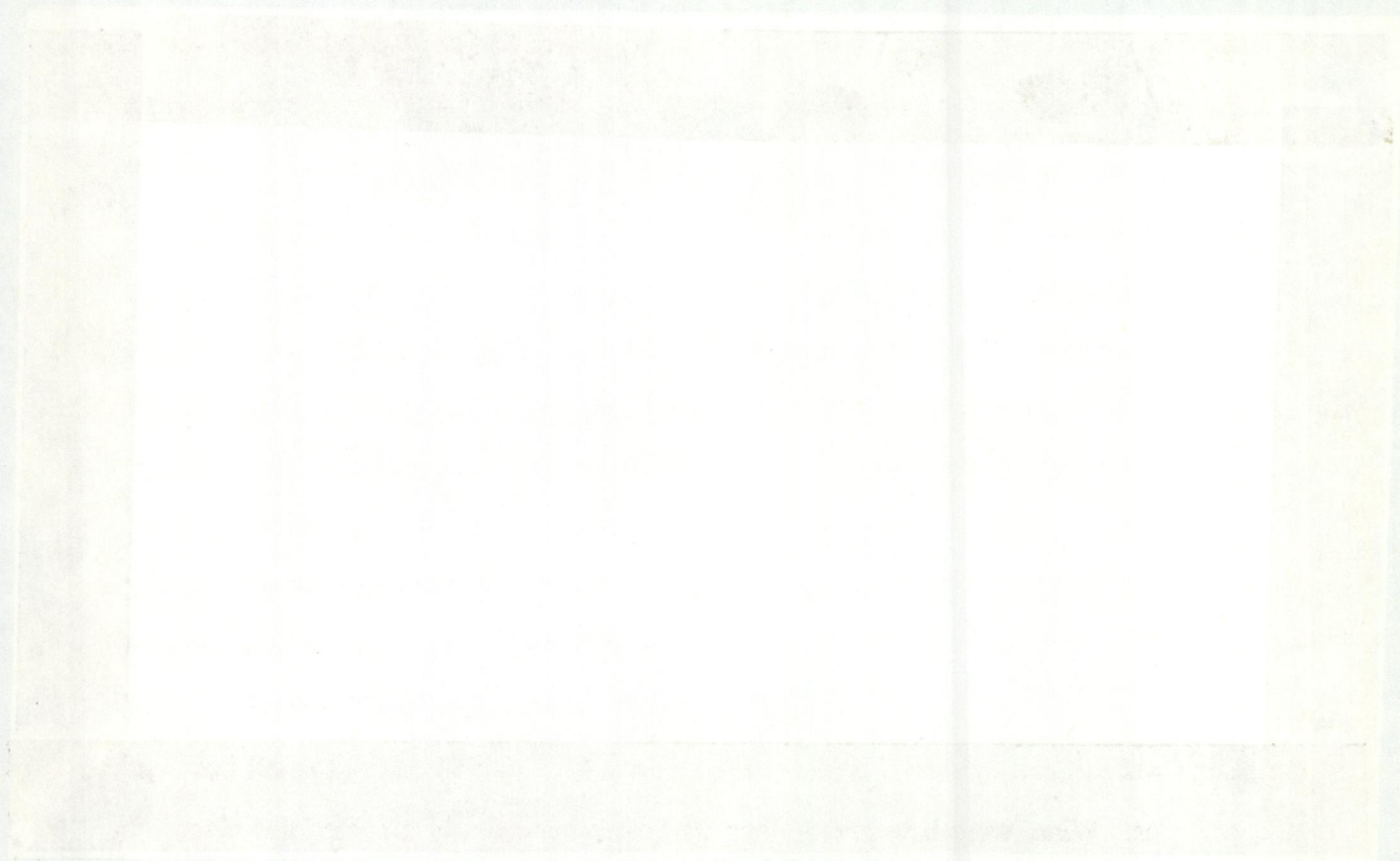
There were many moulds found that were thought to be used for casting. Two piece moulds were used in the making of the penannular brooches. They prepared clay into two balls and the face of each was pressed perfectly flat against a board. A template or pattern of the piece to be cast was then made of wax or lead. Then one side of this would be pressed into the soft clay of one of the flat faces, where a funnel shaped pattern for a pouring channel was made. They then melted out the pattern and poured in the metal.



Fig 7

Ardagh Chalice

National Irish Museum



Joining was usually done by soldering, rivetting, cements and mechanical joins such as folding. A wide range of solders were used but in general they were used only for holding together minor components such as filigree and granulation foils. On the whole the prehistoric craftsmen preferred rivetting and it is seen to have been used more widely in their craftsmanship. Plating became used later on. The surface of the metals could be treated by gilding or tinning. Tin could be wiped onto the surface from a heated 'stick' or the object could be dipped in molten tin. Powdered gold was mixed with mercury to produce aptly named 'butter gold' which was spread over the cleaned metal. The surface was then heated to drive off the mercury. Gold foil therefore could be more economically used rather than the use of solid gold.

Filigree which was found on treasures such as the 'Ardagh Chalice' and the 'Tara Brooch' was one of the great developments in decoration techniques. It is made up of wires and granules soldered on gold foil. Irish filigree is quite exceptionally crisp. The main lines of the design were drawn in wire and reserved areas of decoration filled with small beads of gold granules. Wires were hammered along its length between dies sometimes single or multiple to produce a beading effect. The most sumptuous effect was produced by trichnopoly which gives a finely woven cord e.g. Tara Brooch (fig. 7).

Inlay which is also found on the Tara Brooch which usually consisted of stone, glass, amber, enamel, or niello. The usual inlay technique was *champlevé* where a depression was cast or cut then the glass was softened and pushed into place rather than the technique of *cloisonné* where the cells were created by soldering vertical ribbon on the surface. However *cloisonné* was used but not as widely.

So following Irish craftsmanship of ancient Ireland it can be seen that they made a lot of progression and development in techniques. They acquired techniques and influence from all sorts of things and people but the metal work remained unique and original. The Irish have been left with a great heritage of work this is as beautiful as it is highly skilled. Indeed the work of Angels. The fusion of original Irish craftsmanship and Celtic design attributes to

the qualities that make Irish metalwork unique from that produced in other celtic influenced countries.

Chapter Two

CHAPTER 2

During the late eighteenth century an interest in celtic art arose. Irish culture had become anglofied and our culture had started to lose its true national identity. The revival of the Irish culture had become propaganda ammunition for the Irish rebels. Celticism was romanticised by budding nationalism, and they used it to explore the awakening of social conscience. This celtic art revival work could easily have been blandly derivative, but it was instead, at its best vigorous, appealing and imaginative, especially where artists have applied ancient ornamentation to new media. The concentration of many people upon the development of a recognisably Irish art and craft style did bear fruit. This was a new celtic revival emerging from people, who searching for their true identity rediscovered ancient ruins, celtic crosses, such treasures as the Book of Kells, the Tara Brooch and the Ardagh Chalice. The revival led to the Irish gaining a greater understanding and appreciation of the glories of celtic art and they gained a great flowering for new ideas and adaptation among artists and craftsmen throughout Ireland.

Due to the interest in our country's antiquities it resulted in the foundation in 1841 of Archaeological Society of Ireland. Irish arts now had a society they could use to discover and enjoy some of the greatest crafts ever created in Ireland. Against this fertile background more exciting creative art was produced and more importantly for the nationalists it raised the national spirit, rising the taste and cultivating the nationality of Ireland.

The celtic revival arose in many different forms of art, Irish literature, theatre, painting and craft. Each of the forms fed off the other one as ideas bounced from one to another. Irish culture had left the dark ages and our culture began to flourish. New poetry was written and inspired by celtic romanticism, ideology and symbolism. New books and plays were written. Irish painters also were inspired by the celtic twilight. I will look mainly at the crafts being produced during this period, in particular metalwork and compare it to that produced by ancient Irish metalworkers.

One of the most successful cottage art industries in Ireland at this time was the art metalwork class established in 1892 in the village of Fivemiletown, Co. Tyrone by Mary Montgomery. Montgomery originally ran embroidery and sewing classes for girls since 1876 but in 1891 she decided to try to extend the scope of her work and to find something to help employ the young boys and men in her area. That year she went to London and studied repoussé metal work. By 1892 she was skilled enough to start an art metal class. (fig. 8)

(P.39) The fivemiletown class made a very creditable first showing at the Home Arts and Industries Association Exhibition at the Albert Hall, London in June 1895 and succeeded in winning a gold star for designs by Hugh Montgomery and another for workmanship was earned by Patrick Roche. John Williams, a metalworker from Surrey was so interested with the work being produced he spent his autumn holidays later that year in Fivemiletown and he repeated his visit in 1894 and 1896. His help clearly raised the standard of work being produced there. Williams supplied the majority of designs for the workers at Fivemiletown, their main characteristics being flowery forms of a bold conventional treatment which were mainly derived from Persian and Gothic sources (fig. 9).

The workers made a wide range of domestic furnishings in copper and brass from mirror frames to fireplace fenders, including inkwells, candlesticks, tankards, tea trays, newspaper racks and electric light sconces. Fivemiletown metalwork won frequent awards at exhibitions across the British Isles. These awards amounted to, at one point, a silver cross and sixty nine awards of merit at the Annual Exhibition of the Home Arts and Industries Association in London; five first, seven second, and four third prizes at the Royal Dublin Society; a silver cross, three first and second class awards at Cheltenham; a first prize at Bristol; a first and second prize at Limerick and two prizes at Kirby Lonsdale. The Industry was represented at the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland exhibition 1895, 1899, 1904, 1910 as well as the Dublin International Exhibition of 1907 and the St. Louis World Fair in 1904. During the Celtic revival this school started looking to Celtic designs and decorations. They started to take on board Celtic interlacing and enamelling, and this was a beginning of Irish metal work returning to its origins. The further exploration of reviving Celtic metal work was stopped by the First World War.



Fig 8

A group of Art metal workers at Fivemilestown



Fig 9 *James Archer: casket of repoussé copper, engraved steel, and cast brass, set with enamels, c. 1910–20*

A further development of the celtic revival and the Irish Arts and Crafts took place by the founding of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland. The two main objects of this was to

1. To improve the craftsmanship and attempt to raise the artistic level of his work.
2. To make the workman less of a machine producing many objects from one pattern.

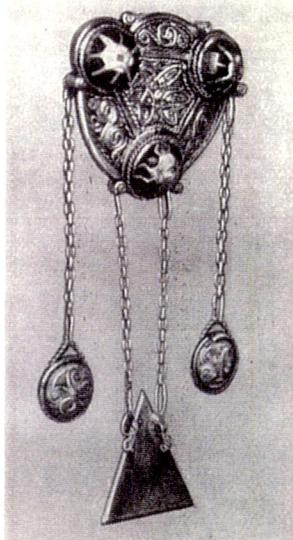
The first exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland was in 1895. The first exhibition was formally opened at the Royal University Buildings, Earlsfort Terrace Dublin. There were some examples of work by well established art manufacturers particularly the Dublin Silversmiths. The centre of the main hall of the exhibition was occupied by Edmond Johnson Case which consisted largely of copies and reproductions of celtic metal work. The whole tone of the articles shown in this case is distinctly original though the Irish Times whilst another critic deemed that Johnson , 'in following and adapting the traditions of ancient Irish Art had produced something eminently satisfactory'. (P.61) The other Dublin Silversmith, Waterhouse & Co., West & Son showed extensive collections of mainly Irish reproduction work. These artists however relied too heavily on the celtic design and didn't really take it and adapt it to their own style. The mere copying of the ancient celtic work is as valueless as it is impossible but by understanding the methods of the celts the crafts could have been more fruitfully inspired towards new designs, and new methods were more interesting and creative art may have been produced. The first exhibition however aroused great interest and the appearance of the celtic revival in the pieces produced caused an awareness among other artists and spectators of our heritage which had almost been forgotten. There were lengthy articles on the inauguration of the society and lists of members and guarantors, and a list of recommended reading for students and workers in artistic crafts includes 'Early Christian Art in Ireland' by Margaret Stokes.

Originally in Ireland the crafts were not connected with fine art and the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art only concentrated on fine art. The Dublin Metropolitan school was originally under the Department of Science and Arts in London. However there was a need for art craft training and after a call for it in 1900 the agriculture and technical department took over the school and crafts were introduced to the school. Celtic art work and its influence

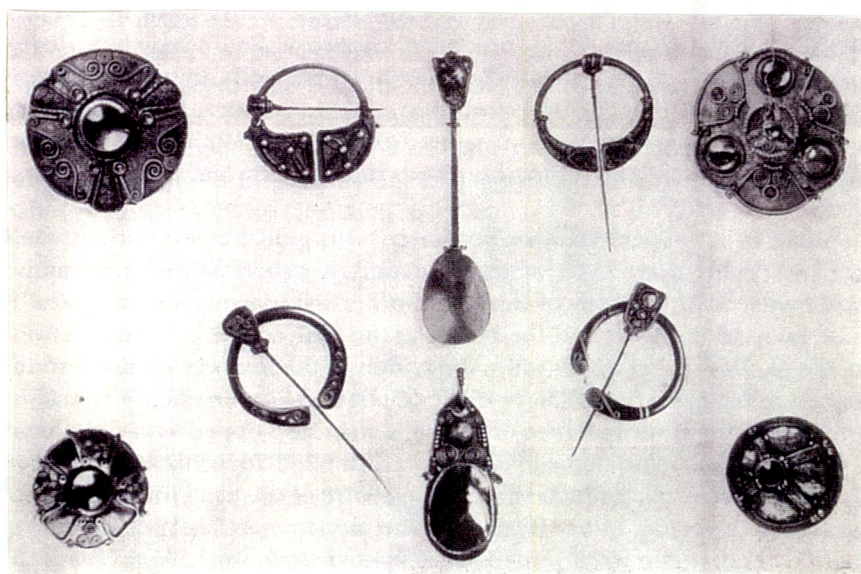
was now thriving. Celtic design was being encouraged and accepted in Irish art circles. Kathleen Fox was an extremely talented student who excelled in the metalwork class and enamelling in the metropolitan school. One of the greatest innovations of the metropolitan school was the metals and enamels department. Oswald Reeves was the first teacher to be appointed in enamels. His classes proved popular and a dozen pupils from the metropolitan school exhibited in painted, cloisonné and champlevé enamels. Oswald Reeves classes worked with celtic designs and techniques. They played around with interlacing, knotwork, zoomorphics, and decorated with enamels. Not only were Reeves enamelling and metalworking classes popular as testified by the number of pieces shown by his pupils at subsequent exhibitions from Dublin 1907 right through to the 1920s, but they also proved very successful and the work achieved a high reputation.

(P.80) The early years of the arts and crafts movement, the 1880s and most of the 1890s were dominated by rural groups, philanthropists, and gifted amateurs but gradually this situation changed in the early 1900s and the emergence of the individual art worker appeared. Among some of them were the metal workers who were apart of the celtic revival. Mary Galway Houston was one of the most talented craftswomen in the British Isles at the turn of the century. She came from Coleraine, Co. Derry. She was extremely versatile in craftwork and she exhibited designs for lace, crochet and leather and she won prizes for her repoussé metalwork. Houston worked in silver, copper, and pure tin, and she made highly ornamented pieces in the celtic style. One of her contributions was a three-handled loving cup and it strangely showed her interest in celtic sources. It was derived from the Dunvegan cup, a famous antique Irish 'methen' drinking vessel. In 1902 she exhibited a silver plated casket. It was wrought in the shape of a celtic shrine covered with panels and bands of interlacing, knotwork and a central circle panel in the inside of female celtic mythological type. Houston turned often to the celtic style to decorate and inspire her pieces.

Mia Cranwill was one of the most outstanding individual art workers to develop in the later stages of the arts and crafts movement. She was born in Dublin but raised in Manchester



Mia Cranwill: 'Inspiration', a brooch in silver, gold, and cloisonné enamels, dating from the early 1920s (The Dublin Magazine, Jan. 1924)



after studying goldsmithing and silversmithing work at Manchester school of art she returned to Ireland to set up a studio in 1917. her jewelry was almost all of celtic inspiration and was often symbolic in theme, designed to express ideas drawn from Irish national poetry and tale (fig. 10).

A ring created by Mia Cranwill, made in gold and platinum set with rubies and crystal was made to illustrate Ella Youngs poem, 'Innisfoil', while another, in silver enriched with gold and set with cloisonné enamels, was meant to symbolise 'reincarnation' and was inscribed on the inside with lines from an ancient Irish poem, 'A song of the sea'. Lines from a poem by W.B. Yeats provided the idea for a brooch in silver and gold and cloisonné enamel, derived in motif from a portion of the Ardagh Chalice. It was called 'inspiration'.

Cranwills jewelry was exhibited fairly widely - at the Royal Dublin Society, at the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland in 1917 and 1921, at the Galerias Barbazanges in Paris in 1922, and at Manchester in 1923 - and found ready admirers for its symbolic qualities, its Irishness, and its fine workmanship. Apart from her symbolic jewelry which invariably depend on explanatory words from the artist for its full appreciation, Cranwill made a number of straightforwardly ornamental and decorative pieces including penannular brooches of traditional Irish type. (Fig. 11) Personally I feel the symbolic jewelry is a more interesting idea and they are executed more successfully than the reconstruction of pennular brooches. By using symbolism and taking aspects of Celtic Art and then using them in a different way creates an exciting piece. This gave a native quality to modern Irish design instead of just imitating something that had been already produced. This brings Celtic Art forward instead of stagnating it. The original celtic art was created with superior excellence to honour God and the imitations of unreachable standards and integrity.

In 1924 Cranwill completed a very remarkable work, a shrine like metal casket wrought in the shape of early Christian stone-built oratory. It was commissioned by Senator Alice Stopford Green, the historian for presentation to the Irish free state senate, and was intended as a receptacle for a vellum roll inscribed with the signatures of all the members of that first



Fig 11 Mia Cranwill: casket of copper, silver, gold and enamels, made to hold the original roll of the first Senate of the Irish Free State, 1924

senate (fig. 12).

The casket was decorated with filigree, repoussé panels and cloisonne enamel in a celtic style. Cranwill intended the scene depicted on the front of the casket to represent 'Patronage' introducing art to the people. Other symbolic figures and design on the back of the casket are mainly indicative of the idiosyncratic view of Irish life. Critics were unanimous in their praise of Cranwills casket. She had become one of the ablest artists/metal-workers of the day. Cranwills fame led to other important church commissions. Cranwills art is an inspiration for modern day metal workers who wish to use original celtic design. Cranwill successfully took aspects of celtic art and instead of imitating it she successfully interpreted it by using it as an influence but fusing it with her own design and ideas. Mia Cranwill is an example of the positive effects of the celtic revival and the exciting metalwork that started to flourish. The combination of present and past was creating a new interest in Irish Crafts.

Chapter Three

CHAPTER 3

Almost two Millenid later Celtic Artwork is our greatest cultural inheritance. Modern Irish metalworkers are still strongly influenced by Celtic design. The use of celtic design is still seen as a strong part of our cultural identity. Celtic design has influenced the modern day Irish metalworker in two ways:

1. Some chose to imitate the original works for commercial reasons.
2. Some metalworkers chose to interpret the celtic designs and fuse past and present, thus resulting in new exciting art.

The interest that still survives about noe-celtic art should not be confined to the admiration of the original works. It should be concerned with the rebirth of the art, not only in its original form but as a new expression of its celtic origin and it is important that the rebirth of neo-celtic design is healthy and experimental so that it can develop to a new maturity and contemporary level. However a lot of modern metalworkers using celtic design have become static. They are creating badly made imitations of original celtic art.

Souvenir shops and craft shops have brought neo-celtic design to the general public. Walk into one of the these shops and you are immediately surrounded by neo-celtic art work. These shops thrive on tourism, and celtic art in the form of souvenirs and jewellery have become a high commercial success. In these souvenir shops you can get everything from plastic Tara Broaches to Book of Kells t-cloths. Celtic design has become a strong national emblem for Ireland. It has become a more modern, cultured form of kitsch than leprachauns and shamrocks, which were once popular national emblems. Neo-celtic art in the form of souvenirs is a huge commercial success (fig.13).

Neo-celtic jewellery in particular seems to be most popular and widely found in these shops. This merchandise does not only sell well to tourists but it is also very popular with native Irish consumers. Neo-celtic style jewellery is found in many forms. A lot of the cheaper jewellery is made from brass or copper; They are usually rings, bracelets, earrings, pendants

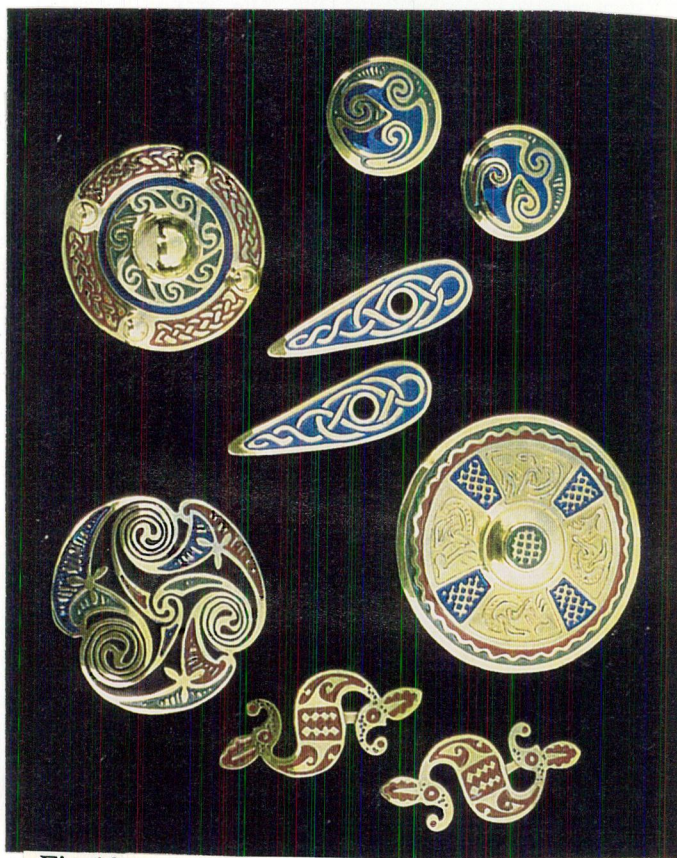
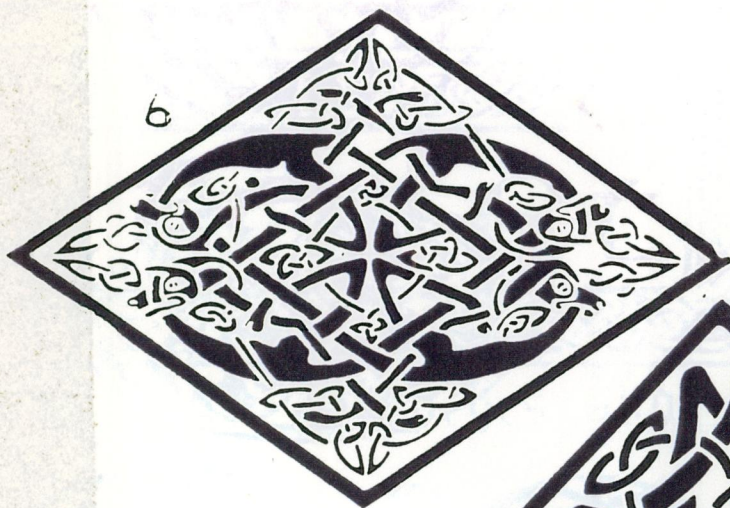
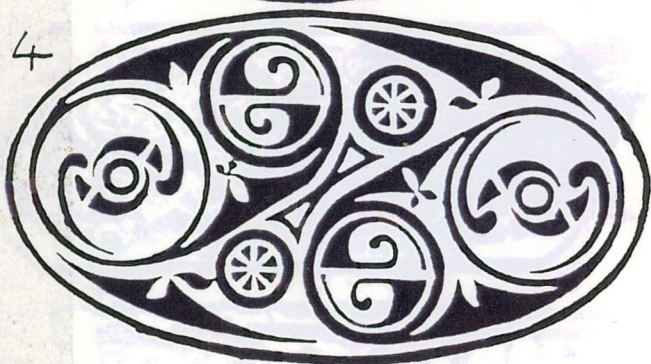
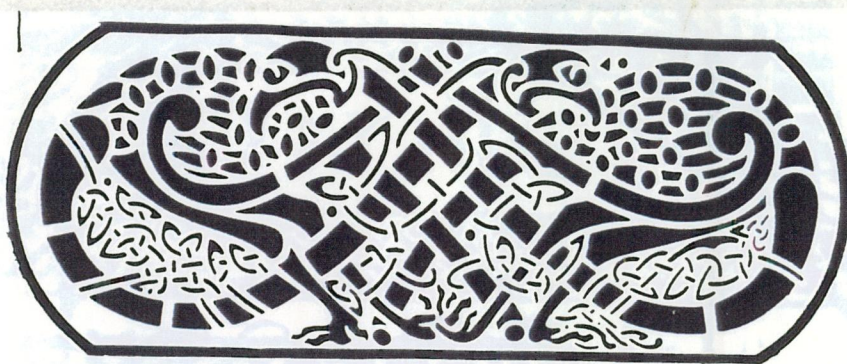


Fig 13

Souvenir-neo-Celtic Jewellery

X Large Celtic Hairslides



and hairclips which are plain simple shapes. They are then embossed, or pierced with celtic spirals, knotwork or interlacing. This type of product can also be found in silver, and gold (fig.14).

They are all production line pieces and are made in exactly the same way. This type of celtic jewellery doesn't really imitate the great techniques discovered by the celts i.e. filigree, enamelling. Surely by creating pieces like these and calling them celtic art, are we not degrading celtic art. People buying these pieces are not getting a proper insight into the magnificence of original celtic art. Contemporary Irish metal workers who are making such products are causing static design in contemporary production lines. Some Irish artists are breaking new ground in the field of interpreting celtic metalwork but it doesn't seem to have reached the shops yet. Production line pieces seem to have fallen into a rut. Celtic design has so much potential if used imaginatively along with contemporary designs.

THE IRISH CRAFTS TRADE FAIR

The Irish Crafts Trade Fair takes place in January for four days every year in the R.D.S. It is one of our largest exhibition/showcases of what is happening in the craft industry in Ireland. There is around 250 stalls and over 20,000 people attend it every year. Not only is it attended by Irish traders but also a large European and Eastern interest. I went to this exhibition in particular to look at Irish metalwork and to see if celtic artwork was still influencing Irish metalworkers. I was quite taken aback at the amount of celtic artwork that was being displayed throughout the different crafts. In relation to metalwork, nearly all the stalls that consisted of silver and goldsmithing, there was evidence of neo-celtic artwork. I lost count after a while of the amount of these stalls displaying celtic metalwork. The amount of neo-celtic jewellery and metalwork was almost nauseating. Stall after stall was filled with replica tara broaches, there was everything from earrings to bracelets to money chips, decorated with celtic interlacing.

One stall offered a large celtic cross or a large celtic harp 24" h x 16" w, these pieces were horrendous. They were beaten out of copper and the pieces were referred to as their catalogue as "decorative wall sculptures" from "Ireland leading craftsmen in the art of hand beaten copperwork". This stall was not on its own all the other silversmith and metalwork stalls displayed similar objects and they all claimed they were of the highest craftsmanship. If we have so many talented craftsmen why are we producing second rate badly designed neo-celtic art. As a metalwork student myself I felt infuriated and frustrated, this trade show left me feeling that if I wanted to sell my pieces I would have to stick some kind of celtic design on it. I approached some of the craftsmen there and asked them why they were continually replicating celtic artwork and design. A lot of them were very vague in the answer a few went on about their interest in celtic art but the main motive seemed to be money and its commercial viability. These skilled craftsmen were sure they had discovered a safe secure living. After looking at the products however one stall seemed to have exactly the same products as the next. The neo-celtic jewellery/metalwork market seemed to be saturated. Once you see one of these stalls you have seen them all. A few of the craftsmen

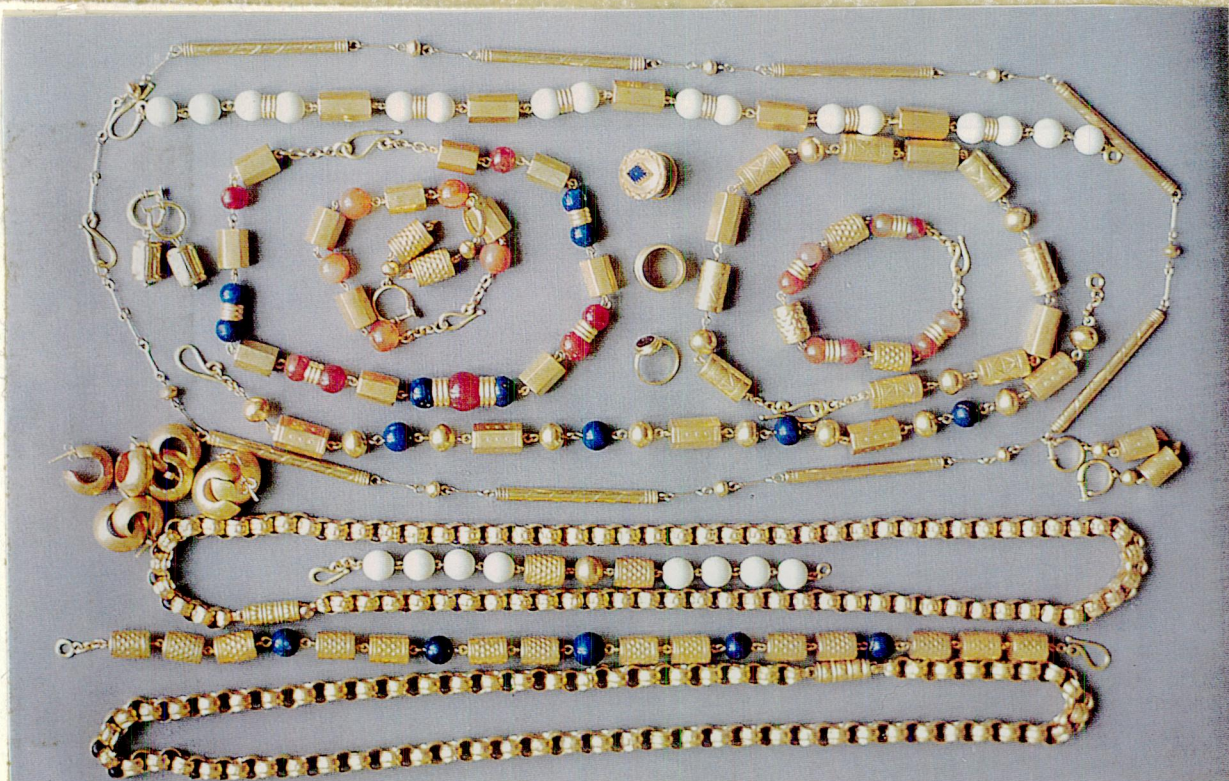


Fig 15

Examples of Maurice Williams jewellery from the Keltoi Range

that I approached and questioned were slightly hostile. They responded to my question "why are you using celtic designs? as a criticism. They realised they were producing kitsch art but the consolation was that it probably would sell, if neo-celtic art sells why could they not take aspects of celtic art and use them in an exciting contemporary way. One craftsman that I talked to tried to do this walking past the different stalls that had become monotonous ??? pieces caught my eye, his company was called Celtic Connections. He was excited about his designs and creations. He had taken aspects of celtic designs and then used them in a more individual way. he was more than willing to answer my questions and he seemed to have a genuine interest in celtic art. His work was a successful combination of celtic decoration along with his own designs and techniques (fig. 16). He patinated his jewellery which gave them a more refreshing finish. Maurice Williams the name of this craftsman was the only craftsman using celtic art in metalwork to its full advantage. Even though I felt his work could be pushed a little further, he was the only silversmith there actually breaking new ground. Commercially his work also seemed to be successful, he said that he had a satisfactory amount of orders from traders. Surely even the tourists are starting to become bored with what is being produced by modern day neo-celtic artists. Maybe it is time for the mockery of celtic art to finish and then we can use our most valued heritage to its full potential and made exciting contemporary work. I found the metalwork/jewellery at the trade show uninteresting, kitsch and disillusioning. Surely a show with an important showcase, Irish craft metal should have more to show. I felt as a metalworker myself that neo-celtic art had been badly and overly used and the whole trade fair was a bad reflection on contemporary Irish metalworkers, especially those using celtic art as an influence not only has celtic art stagnated it seems to have gone backwards instead of forward.

"The inability to change is death in art and the power to change is life". The modern Irish metalsmith has almost brought death to celtic jewellery by continually reproducing the same jewellery, tara broaches, bracelets with celtic interlacing, celtic decorated high crosses etc, etc. These metalsmith interest in celtic art should not be confined to admiration of the original works but it should be concerned with the rebirth of the art not only as its original form but as a new expression of its celtic origins.



Beads of gold and precious stones from Una de Blacam's collection.

Fig 16

Beads of gold and stone from Una Blacam's Collection



Fig 17 Gold necklace from Una de Blacam

One such artist who also uses celtic design successfully is the goldsmith Una de Blacam. Una is a goldsmith who was heavily influenced by ancient Irish gold. She studied painting in NCAD before going to Oslo where she found herself drawn to goldsmithing. She found herself strongly attracted to simple shapes and the geometrical decorations on celtic metalwork. She studied the celtic techniques and designs and used them to influence her work she found Irish ancient gold to be one of her most lasting influences. She loved the repousse technique used by celtic jewelry and she carried it through in her own work. Unas necklaces, which are her trademark are made from 18-22 carat gold. She uses the repousse technique, working on the gold sheets with steel pinches on a yielding surface. her jewelry is remarkably similar to that of the five thousand years ago bronze metalworkers, in the way she makes her pieces, but the design of her jewelry has its own original qualities. Una has successfully taken the craftsmanship and design of the original celtic jewelry and has come up with something original and exciting. She is a good example (fig. 17) of an Irish artist using her own cultural heritage successfully without imitating it. Una is inspired by the construction techniques of the celtic metalwork which she applies her own ideas and designs to. Una de Blacam work is not obviously celt inspired. Its the subtleness of celticism in her work that makes her work so intriguing and interesting. Unas work has an ancient Irish work look about but it also manages to have a contemporary and modern presence about it (fig. 18).

Una de Blacam and Maurice Williams from celtic Connections are examples of two of the Irish metalworkers that are successfully using celtic metalwork as successful influence. They have taken their cultural heritage and fused it with their modern designs and ideas to create exciting worthwhile pieces. William Morris is the step between the obvious tara brooch and interlacing jewellers and Una de Blacam who has taken modern day celtic jewelry to a different level. Ireland has such a long tradition in metalwork and Ireland possesses a large number of talented and highly skilled metalsmiths, surely we should be creating more imaginative, highly crafted pieces that would enhance our culture and peoples perception of our culture.

CONCLUSION

Ireland has such an old tradition in metalsmithing. We have such an established heritage due to the amount of hoards of antiquities found, and that are on show to the public in the national museum. We have an invaluable amount of artefacts to supply us with an insight into the technical and design history of Ireland. These artefacts have given Irish metalsmiths invaluable resources and inspiration to influence their own work. The original celtic metalwork hoards e.g. Ardagh Chalice, Tara Brooch, etc. are a jewel for any country to have.

Throughout the ages we have used our national heritage e.g. the celtic metalwork as an inspiration. Celtic design has become a strong part of our national identity and it is now our national emblem. Even though the celts invaded several other european countries, it was their ethos that most greatly influenced us, and we are the country that kept so many of the cultural traits in our own culture. We should use this cultural heritage to our advantage and exploit the potential of fusing original celtic design with contemporary ideas to create new and exciting pieces of metalwork. We possess a heritage that many other countries envy and therefore we should use it to the best of our advantage.

We need to move on from imitation to interpretation: "the inability to change is death in art and the power to change is life". Metalsmiths must appreciate ancient Irish metalwork but they must deliberately set aside all that they had previously valued in search of a change that must exist to allow art to live and mature.

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