Galway in Objects

Teacher's Resource

múseam museum
Músaem Cathrach na Gaillimhe
Galway City Museum

Claddagh Ring

by Richard Joyce
c. 1700

Iarsmaí na Gaillimhe
Galway in Objects

Discussion

Display a picture of the ring (without any details)

Claddagh Ring.
© Galway City Museum.

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Discussion A (speculation)

Use the following questions to guide a class discussion.

Children should be encouraged to use the image of the object as evidence and to give reasons for their answers based on their observations. Zoom in on the object to examine the details.

- Describe what you see ...
- Have you ever seen it before?
- Do you like the way it looks? Why?
- What is it made of?
- Are there any marks on it?
- Do you recognise any of its emblems?
- Who might have made it?
- Why was it made?
- Who might have owned it?
- How old do you think it is? Why?
- Do you think that it's valuable? Why?

Galway City Museum has published a high-resolution copy of this photograph on its website, which can be downloaded for print or digital display.

www.GalwayCityMuseum.ie/Galway-In-Objects/Claddagh-Ring

Lesson

Read out the story of the Claddagh Ring

It is recommended that children listen to the story without seeing the text on screen.

Left: Italian *fede* ring, 1400s.© The Trustees of the British Museum.

Right: English *fede* ring, 1600s. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

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Rings in History

People have worn rings on their fingers for thousands of years. In Ancient Egypt, Pharaohs and other important people wore gold signet, or seal, rings featuring their name and status in hieroglyphics, which could be used to stamp or sign a document.

From Egypt the custom of wearing rings spread to Ancient Greece, where they were mostly used for decoration.

In Ancient Rome, rings were symbols of status and only the privileged could wear rings of gold (less important people wore iron rings). In time, the privilege of wearing gold rings was extended to almost everyone, except slaves, in the Roman Empire. The Romans started the custom of betrothal, or engagement, rings, which symbolised the promise of marriage between two people.

The Claddagh Ring

The type of ring popularly known as the **Claddagh Ring** shows two hands holding a crowned heart. It is a variation of a ***fede* (meaning 'faith')** ring, which originated in **Ancient Rome** and was popular throughout **Medieval Europe.** These *fede* rings commonly featured two clasped hands representing the joining of hands at a marriage ceremony.

This particular gold ring is the oldest known Claddagh Ring made in Galway. It was made by local goldsmith **Richard Joyce** (or **Ioyes**) around **1700** and is stamped with his initials, RI (see 'The Story of Richard Joyce'). From its large size, it is thought to be a man's ring. The ring is also stamped with two other sets of initials NCM and MRC, which are believed to be the initials of a bride and groom. Galway City Museum bought the ring in 2020.

SATURDAY, APRIL 30, 1898.

DILLON, JEWELLER,
WILLIAM STREET, GALWAY, AND CHURCH STREET, ATHLONE.
(ESTABLISHED OVER HALF A CENTURY)

MAKER OF THE GALWAY CLADDAGH RING, FROM THE ORIGINAL DESIGN.

As Exhibited at Irish Arts' Exhibition, Dublin, 1882; Irish Exhibition, London, 1888; and the World's Fair, Chicago, 1893.
SUPPLIED TO HER EXCELLENCY THE COUNTESS OF ABERDEEN AND THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FIELD MARSHAL LORD WOLSELEY, K.P.G., C.B., &c., &c.
His Lordship pronounced the Ring as being "VERY WELL MADE AND VERY PRETTY."

THE Great House FOR Wedding Rings AND WEDDING PRESENTS

HIGH-CLASS WORK.

PRICES AS LOW AS POSSIBLE.

LARGEST STOCK OF Connemara Marble Jewellery IN THE KINGDOM.

GOLD AND SILVER WATCHES OF THE Very Best Make.

Large & Select Stock OF GOLD AND SILVER JEWELLERY.

Complicated and Defective Watches Repaired.
ONLY FIRST-CLASS WORKMEN EMPLOYED.
PRICES AS LOW AS ANY HOUSE IN IRELAND.

DILLON, JEWELLER,
William Street, Galway, and Church Street, Athlone.
(ESTABLISHED OVER HALF A CENTURY.)

Dillon Jeweller, William St, Galway: 'Maker of the Claddagh Ring, from the Original Design', *Galway Express,* 30 April 1898.

Richard Joyce stamped his work with his initials and, sometimes, with an anchor, representing the town of Galway.

Though rings of this type were made in Galway from the early 1700s, they only became known as Claddagh Rings from the 1840s onwards, when Victorian travel writers, Anna Marie and Samuel Carter Hall, visited Galway and wrote about the Claddagh, a fishing village on the edge of the town: 'They have many peculiar customs. One is worthy of special note. The wedding-ring is an heirloom in the family. It is regularly transferred (by a mother) to her daughter first married and on to their descendants. These rings are largely of solid gold.' These words were accompanied by a sketch of a Claddagh Ring.

By the late 1800s, the Claddagh Ring was a popular wedding ring in Galway and the surrounding area, in Connemara and on the Aran Islands, and were being produced by goldsmiths in Galway and elsewhere in Ireland.

Having been made and worn in Galway for more than 300 years, the Claddagh Ring has become synonymous with the city and a symbol of Irish identity abroad, thanks to its popularity among the Irish Diaspora (Irish emigrants and their descendants). The rings have been famously worn by people such as **Queen Victoria** and **Walt Disney.**

According to tradition, a person whose heart is taken wears the ring with the crown facing inward (towards the wrist), while a person whose heart is free wears the ring with the crown facing outward (towards the nail).

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Discussion B (informed)

Claddagh Ring.
© Galway City Museum.

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Having shared the story of the ring, use the following questions to guide a class discussion

- What three emblems make up a Claddagh Ring?
- Who made this Claddagh Ring?
- How old is it?
- Who wore it?
- How would you know if the wearer was married?
- How did the Museum acquire the ring?

Curriculum Links

5th and 6th Classes

These lessons and activities have been developed with the 5th and 6th class primary school curriculum in mind, but they can be adapted by teachers to suit the needs of older or younger learners.

History

- **Skills and Concept Development:** Working as an Historian
- **Strand (Strand Unit):** Local Studies (My locality through the ages); Story (Stories from the lives of people in the past); Politics, conflict and society (Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ireland); Continuity and change over time (Literature, arts, crafts and culture)

Primary Language Curriculum

- **Strands:** Oral Language; Reading; Writing

Visual Arts

- **Strand (Strand Unit):** Drawing (Making drawings; Looking and responding); Construction (Making constructions; Looking and responding)

Drama

- **Strand (Strand Unit):** Drama to explore feelings, knowledge and ideas, leading to understanding (Exploring and making drama; Co-operating and communicating in making drama)

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Resources

Images

The download symbol used throughout this document indicates that an image is available from the 'Galway in Objects' section of the Museum website for use in the classroom.

Video

Galway City Museum has created a short video about the Claddagh Ring that can be watched in the classroom.

Visit **www.GalwayCityMuseum.ie/Galway-In-Objects**

Books & Articles

Rachel Church, *Rings* (2014).

Ida Delamer, 'The Claddagh Ring', *Irish Arts Yearbook Review,* Vol. 12 (1996), pp. 181–187.

W. Dillon & T. Dillon, 'The Claddagh Ring', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society,* Vol. 4, No. 1 (June 1905), pp. 11–16.

Sean McMahon, *The Story of the Claddagh Ring* (2005).

Jack Mulveen, 'Galway Goldsmiths, Their Marks and Ware', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society,* Vol. 46 (1994), pp. 43–64.

Diana Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty* (2013).

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Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme

Comhairle Cathrach na Gaillimhe
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Contact Us...

t: +353 (0) 91 532 460

e: museum@galwaycity.ie

p: Galway City Museum

Spanish Parade, Galway

H91 CX5P

Museum Opening Times...

Open from Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm

Closed on Good Friday, Christmas Day and St Stephen's Day. Galleries close at 4.45pm

ADMISSION IS FREE