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**The Mirror and the Minister**

An extremely rare Bronze mirror, dating from the Iron Age and discovered near Didcot , Oxfordshire, has had a temporary export bar placed on it to provide a last chance to raise the £33,000 needed to keep it in the UK.

Culture Minister Ed Vaizey took the decision to defer granting an export licence for the mirror following a recommendation by the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA), administered by Arts Council England, on the grounds that it was of outstanding aesthetic importance, and of outstanding significance to the study of Iron Age Britain, the development of decorative styles in the period, and the evolution of Iron Age mirrors.

The mirror is made of copper-alloy, and consists of two elements – a plate with elegant curvilinear ornament on the back, and a cast openwork handle. It is in very good condition and its complex and beautiful decoration is an unusual and innovative example of Celtic ‘mirror-style’ art’.

Discovered by a metal detectorist in the Didcot area prior to 2007, it is a rarity – there are only 18 complete and decorated mirrors are known from the later Iron Age (300 BC – AD 50).

Mirrors from southern England, like this specimen are highly significant for our understanding of the later Iron Age, and offer important insights into the social changes which occurred in the century before the Roman conquest in AD 43. They are potentially objects of high status, and their manufacture and usage, alongside toilet implements such as tweezers and grinders for cosmetics, demonstrate the importance of personal appearance as a means of social expression during the later Iron Age.

Culture Minister Ed Vaizey said:

“The Didcot Mirror is a beautiful object dating from the Iron Age and would be a tremendous addition to any one of our many outstanding national, regional and local museums. I hope the export bar I’ve placed on the mirror allows time for a UK buyer to come forward and secure it for the nation.”

Leslie Webster from the RCEWA said:

‘This rare and beautiful mirror is an outstanding example of Celtic art in the later Iron Age, and is particularly unusual in the way that its delicately incised ornament challenges some of the conventional design rules for the decoration of these high-status objects. Precious symbols of high social standing, these mirrors also seem to be an exclusively British phenomenon, making this fine example a highly desirable acquisition for a British museum’.

The decision on the export licence application for the Mirror will be deferred for a period ending on 14 June 2014 inclusive. This period may be extended until 14 September inclusive if a serious intention to raise funds to purchase the Mirror is made at the recommended price of £33,000.

Offers from public bodies for less than the recommended price through the private treaty sale arrangements, where appropriate, may also be considered by Mr Vaizey. Such purchases frequently offer substantial financial benefit to a public institution wishing to acquire the item.

An image of the mirror can be downloaded from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/thedcms/13869122544/>

For media information contact:

Claire Coveney, Media Relations Officer, Arts Council England  
Tel: 0207 973 5133 Mobile: 07872 416 679

Email: [Claire.coveney@artscouncil.org.uk](mailto:Claire.coveney@artscouncil.org.uk)

**Notes to Editors**

1. Organisations or individuals interested in purchasing the mirror should contact RCEWA on 0845 300 6200.
2. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest is an independent body, serviced by Arts Council England, which advises the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on whether a cultural object, intended for export, is of national importance under specified criteria.
3. Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people’s lives. Between 2010 and 2015, it will invest £1.9 billion of public money from government and an estimated £1.1 billion from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. www.artscouncil.org.uk

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