

Fragments of a brigandine from Coldingham Priory, Berwickshire

by David H Caldwell

In the excavations at Coldingham Priory, conducted by the Berwickshire Naturalists Club, two iron plates of a brigandine were uncovered (Elliot and Thomson 1970, 102; Thomson 1970, 210–11). These were later donated to the Museum in 1974 by Berwick County Council, and replicas, made in the Museum's Conservation Laboratory by Mr T Bryce, were provided for display in the County Library, Duns.

A brigandine – or a pair of brigandines – was a sleeveless jacket, normally laced up the front, in which plates or scales of metal were riveted together beneath a covering of cloth. They were worn in Europe from the 14th to the 17th century for protection. Many seem to have been costly garments worn by royalty and the nobility, though in Scotland in the summons to the hosting at Roslin Muir in 1514 they are included in the items with which the burgesses (of Irvine) were enjoined to provide themselves (*Irvine Muns*, I, 34–5).

The plates from Coldingham are of forged iron, slightly convex to fit to the body. The first plate (fig 11, a) is trapezoidal in outline with curved corners, measuring in greatest length 0·13 m and 0·04 m in height. Piercing it are four groups of three brass nails and one solitary one at one end, which have star-shaped heads showing on the outer face, ten only surviving. These groups

are arranged in triangular fashion the length of the top (longer) edge of the plate, and the heads would originally have protruded through the cloth covering to form a decorative design. The nails themselves are for fixing the adjacent plates so that there would be a complete overlapping and the top edges of each row would overlap the bottom edges of the rows above. A clearly defined fragment of another plate is still held in position by three of the nails. A diagram of how the plates are arranged in a German (?) mid-16th-century brigandine in the Tower of London is given by Blair (1958, fig 300. See also Dufty 1968, pl CXXIII). There are no signs of nails, or holes for them, along the bottom edge of the plate which suggests it may have formed one of the bottom elements of the garment.

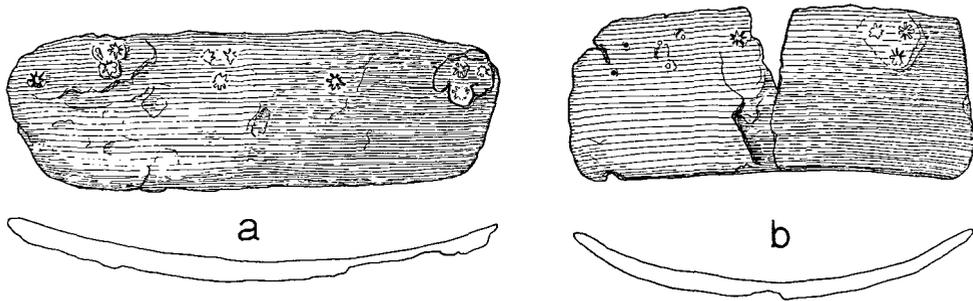


FIG 11 Brigandine fragments from Coldingham Priory (1:2)

The second plate (fig 11, b), originally discovered in two separate pieces, is similar in shape to the first but deeper and not so long. It measures 0.105 m by 0.043 m. It has had four groups of three nails along its top (shorter) edge, the brass star heads of four only surviving, and a small fragment of another plate held by three of the nails. There are no signs of nails or holes along the bottom edge, again suggesting that this was from the bottom of the garment.

The first plate, judging by its shape, would have been attached to the front or back, the second plate was probably a side piece. The stars on the nail heads are all eight pointed and may originally have been gilt. They are not all of a uniform appearance, most being flat and spiky, but one or two have a more graceful flower-like form, perhaps suggesting the work of a different hand.

Armour of any sort from Scotland is exceedingly rare, and there are no other known pieces of brigandine armour surviving. One or two complete garments survive in English collections, and recently some fragments were excavated at the Dominican Friary in Boston, Lincolnshire (Moorhouse 1972 41-2, fig 8, 3). Several brigandines are preserved in European museums, many of these brought together and discussed by Laking (1920, 189 ff). Amongst these are some which have gilt rivet heads studding the material covering of the garment, like a crimson velvet example in the armoury in Vienna and another in the museum at Darmstadt (Laking 1920, 196). A brigandine forming part of the Burgundian booty that the Swiss took at the battle of Murten or Nancy in 1476-7, and now in the museum in Basle, is made of iron plates with several groups of three rivets on each, similarly with eight-pointed star heads, and covered with what must originally have been red linen. On the back of the plates is stamped the Agnus Dei (Deuchler 1963, 335, Abb. 328, 329).

The earliest mention of brigandines in Scotland of which the writer is aware is in 1459 when payments are first recorded in the Lord Treasurer's Accounts as being made to Ligier, described as a Frenchman, and maker of brigandines, or 'lez briggandinis' (ERS, 6, 581). In 1462 he was paid for two ells of silk cloth called 'satynfigure' for a pair of brigandines for the King (ERS, 7,

145) and this is the last mention of him. Payments by the Lord Treasurer were also made in 1537 and 1542 for 'fyne satyne' and 'sad tanny velvet' for covering brigandines (*ALHTS*, 6, 339; 8, 87). In 1504 James IV gave James Hog 14 shillings 'to lous his brigentinis' and gave Daniel Doule money to buy a pair for the raid of Eskdale (*ALHTS*, 2, 451, 452). Another interesting reference also from these same accounts, is that the armourer, William Smeithbeird, supplied 'nalis ourgilt to ane pair of brigantynis' in 1537 (*ALHTS*, 6, 337).

It is therefore not unlikely that these two plates of a brigandine from Coldingham priory are of Scottish workmanship. In the light of the documentary sources just mentioned, and an observable conservatism in other Scottish arms and armour, it does not seem possible at present to date them any closer than c 1450–c 1550.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The original identification of these pieces as parts of a brigandine was made by Mr H R Robinson, Mr C Blair and Mr A V B Norman, who also noted the different appearance of some of the rivet heads. The author is grateful to Mr T D Thomson for permission to publish the brigandine fragments.

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