

# Two Viking-age silver brooch fragments believed to be from the 1858 Skaill (Orkney) hoard

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## SUMMARY

*It is argued that two Viking-age silver objects, a complete, single pin and an elaborately ornamented pin-head, recently purchased by the National Museum, derive from the 1858 Skaill (Orkney) hoard. The circumstances of the discovery of the Skaill hoard and the retrieval of its dispersed components are described: a possibly similar discovery in Oxtro Broch, Birsay is also discussed.*

## INTRODUCTION

In 1981 the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland purchased two unprovenanced silver brooch fragments from the legatees of Miss Jean Robertson of Kirkwall, Orkney. Miss Robertson was the daughter of the only son of James Robertson who had been Sheriff-substitute of Orkney from 1846 until his death in 1876. It was thus her grandfather who had had the responsibility in 1858 for acting on behalf of the Queen's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer in the matter of the treasure trove declaration of the largest hoard of Viking silver to have been found in Scotland – that deposited c 950 near the shore of the Bay of Skaill, on the west coast of Orkney Mainland (VA II, 119–33, figs 59–61; VA VI, 237–8, fig 78; Graham-Campbell 1976, 119–21 & refs). It is argued here that it is beyond all reasonable doubt that these two items derive from this hoard, despite their having no known history.

The two pieces of silver in question both formed part of large 'ball-type' penannular brooches, an ostentatious type of dress-fastener with globular terminals which was developed in Ireland during the second half of the 9th century, but which was particularly popular amongst the Norse during the first half of the 10th century (Graham-Campbell 1983a). The first to be described is a simple, but complete pin in almost perfect condition with an unworn shaft, whereas the second item consists of an elaborately ornamented pin-head without its shaft.

## THE FRAGMENTS

### PIN

*Silver pin* with a globular head (illus 1 & 2) which is plain apart from a lightly incised, unfinished zoomorphic motif on the front and a ring-knot on the reverse, described below (illus 6). The side-collars, shaft-collar and terminal have respectively one, two and three transversely

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hatched mouldings, emphasized with ring-stamping. The terminal is slightly everted and the pin-top plain. The pin-head is socketed with a shaft of circular cross-section becoming flattened on both sides, before tapering to a point; it is plain on the front, but the reverse has three lightly incised pairs of lines forming the beginning of a two-strand twist which is wrongly laid out and



ILLUS 1 Two silver brooch fragments believed to be from the Skaill hoard, Orkney (IL840 & 841)

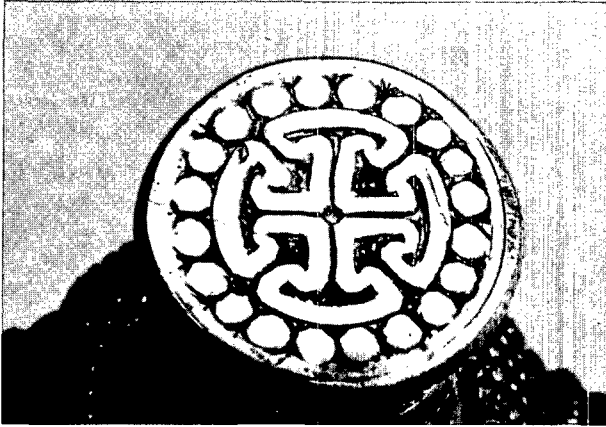
could not therefore have been continued. The pin-shaft shows no signs of wear, but the front of the pin-head is dented. Length: 320 mm; weight: 104.6 g (NMAS cat no: IL840).

#### PIN-HEAD

*Silver, pin-head* of globular form (illus 1, 3, 4 & 5) with a brambled front and incised ornament on the reverse and pin-top. It is holed in two places as a result of casting flaws. The brambling is made by diagonal criss-cross filing, finished by ring-stamping, and is carried around the sides of the pin-head to terminate in each corner of the reverse in a stylized animal-head, triangular in form with ring-and-dot stamped eyes. The incised pattern on the reverse is contained within four compass-incised concentric circles, comprising a transversely hatched band with plain borders surrounding a cruciform fret pattern; the ornament on the pin-top consists of a slightly simplified version of the same cruciform fret pattern, surrounded by a beaded band within a plain border (illus 3). The terminal is slightly everted and decorated with two bands of incised ornament bordered and separated by transversely hatched, angular mouldings; the upper band is filled with interlace, whilst the lower contains a chevron pattern between two lines. The side-collars consist of a transversely hatched, angular moulding between two plain mouldings. At



ILLUS 2 Reverse of pin-head of complete pin (as illus 1)



ILLUS 3 Pin-top ornament of separate pin-head (as illus 1)

the base of the pin-head there projects, from a transversely hatched, convex moulding, a conical tenon for the attachment of the (lost) pin-shaft, with *in situ* traces of solder. Length: 86 mm; weight: 117.7 g (NMAS cat no: IL841).

### ANALYSES

These two items were analysed by X-ray fluorescence<sup>1</sup> in the National Museum's Research Laboratory by Dr Jim Tate who concluded that their composition agreed well with XRF analyses of 'ring-money' from the Skail hoard, with a high silver and low zinc content which distinguishes them from the 'ring-money' in a later Viking hoard from Orkney, that deposited c 998 on Burray (VA II, 135-8; Graham-Campbell 1976, 123, 126 & refs; White & Tate 1982).

The pin-head and shaft of the complete pin are different in composition, although both are made of a silver-copper alloy with traces of lead, gold and bismuth; the difference between the two lies particularly in the presence of zinc in the pin-head which is absent from the shaft. It must be noted, however, that the analysis of the shaft is unlikely to be representative of its basic metal in that it is taken (unlike that of the pin-head) from its surface which, in common with other Viking silver pieces, is enriched with silver due to preferential removal of copper during corrosion (or possibly intentionally by surface treatment after manufacture). In Dr Tate's opinion, however, this alone would not explain the compositional difference from the head. This is, nevertheless, no cause for surprise given that the pin-head represents a single casting, whereas the shaft has been hammered out from a rod or ingot.

	Iron	Copper	Zinc	Gold	Lead	Bismuth	Silver
Pin-head:	<0.1	4.8	0.6	0.3	0.6	0.4	93.2 %
Pin-shaft:	0.1	2.7	<0.1	0.3	0.3	0.2	96.3 %

The metal of the separate pin-head is likewise a silver-copper alloy containing traces of lead and gold; no tin was detected and zinc and bismuth, if present, were at the lowest detection limit. A black deposit within the incised ornament on the reverse was also analysed and showed a high proportion of copper and little sulphur, suggesting that it may be (black) copper oxide rather than a niello inlay, in agreement with its microscopic examination when features characteristic of niello inlay were not apparent. Analysis of the metal lump on the tenon determined that it is a lead-tin solder.

For comparative purposes the hoop and one terminal of 'ball-type' brooch IL3 from the Skail hoard, to which it is suggested below that this pin-head belongs, were also analysed by Dr Tate. The hoop (which was analysed in two separate places), the terminals and the pin-head will all have been made separately so that some differences in their composition are to be expected.

	Copper	Zinc	Gold	Lead	Bismuth	Silver
Pin-head	11.0	<0.1	0.6	0.9	≤0.1	87.4 %
IL3 terminal	7.1	<0.1	0.7	1.4	≤0.1	90.8 %
IL3 hoop 1	5.0	<0.1	0.8	0.7	≤0.1	93.5 %
IL3 hoop 2	5.6	0.2	0.7	0.6	≤0.1	92.9 %

These analyses do, however, all display the same low level of zinc and bismuth, but a higher proportion of copper is present, possibly intentionally, in the elaborate cast elements (the terminal and, even more notably, the pin-head) than in the simple silver rod which forms the hoop.

## PROVENANCE

### THE RECOVERY OF THE SKAILL HOARD

The first possibility for consideration concerning these two unprovenanced 'ball-type' brooch fragments must be whether or not they might constitute, or have formed part of, a hitherto unrecorded Viking hoard from Orkney. Although this cannot be ruled out altogether, the chances are reduced when it is appreciated that only *one* of the 40 Viking-age hoards known from Scotland contains 'ball-type' brooches and that is the Skaill hoard in which a minimum of 16 examples are represented amongst the 19 brooches and fragments previously published. Only one other find of a silver 'ball-type' brooch is on record from Scotland, the 'thistle-brooch' from Gulberwick, Shetland (VA II, fig 63), although it is suggested here in the appendix that a piece of silver found in the brooch of Oxtro, Birsay, Orkney, in the 19th century (but melted down by a Kirkwall watchmaker), might have formed part of the pin-shaft of such a brooch. Given that these two brooch fragments belonged to the Robertson family who had had professional dealings with the Skaill hoard, and that one of the chief characteristics of this hoard is its large number and variety of 'ball-type' brooches (both complete and fragmentary), it must be more probable that they have 'escaped' from the Skaill hoard rather than that they represent a different and otherwise unknown find. The circumstances surrounding the discovery, dispersal and partial recovery of the Skaill hoard, which have never been fully described in print, readily allow of this interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

The Viking silver hoard now known as the Skaill hoard was discovered in March 1858 on the property of Quoyloo in the parish of Sandwick, Mainland, Orkney. Its contents were dispersed amongst its several finders and were only recovered, although not in their entirety, 'owing to the prompt and zealous exertions of Mr George Petrie' (Anderson 1874, 575). The full extent of Petrie's exertions becomes clear from the unpublished report or 'Notice' concerning the recovery of the hoard which he wrote to accompany his official inventory which is dated 5 April 1858 (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 3 (1857–60), 247–9). Further information concerning his actions is contained in his draft of a letter to John Stuart, Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, dated 18 March, written whilst he was still in the process of collecting up the finds. Petrie's draft 'Notice' and the draft letter are preserved, together with copies of six receipts issued by him to the five main finders, three draft inventories and three letters to him concerning the hoard, amongst the manuscripts belonging to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (SAS 487, 1). They form the basis for the following summary account of the hoard's discovery, and its subsequent recovery by Petrie, told largely in his own words:<sup>3</sup>

In the early part of March a young man<sup>4</sup> was dowing [*sic*] near the Parish Church of Sandwick which stands on the north side of the Bay of Skail and a short distance from the shore.<sup>5</sup> The ground is sandy and frequented by rabbits and near a hole scooped out by one of these the lad observed some pieces apparently of metal. He lifted them and took them home one of them being the hook No of the Inventory herewith sent.<sup>6</sup> A day or two afterwards he discovered

that they were silver, and mentioned it to some of his neighbours. About a week afterwards, on the 11th Ultó., some people were down one morning at the Bay collecting seaweed and having to wait for the landing of some which was floating in the surf one of them suggested that they should go and examine the place where the lad had found the pieces of the silver in the hope that they too might pick some up. They went accordingly and one of them thrust a 'ware fork' into a rabbit hole and pulled out a number of the silver rings which he at first thought to be 'Tangles' but the glitter of some of the silver soon undeceived him and immediately a scramble commenced each one striving to secure as much of the Treasure as possible. It is probable that some of the articles were injured in the struggle at all events some of the wire cord with which the Torcs are ornamented appear to have suffered a good deal since they were unearthed. Subsequently a number of boys and others visited the place and have carefully sifted the sand thereabouts and discovered a number of fragments of Ring Brooches, and Torcs, and coin &c. the most of which it is believed has been given up.

Petrie was also 'informed that stones were discovered set on edge in the form of a cist into which it is believed the silver articles had been deposited'.

News of the hoard first reached Petrie on the morning of Saturday 13 March and on the following Monday he travelled from Kirkwall to Sandwick, having obtained the approval and authority of Robertson, as Sheriff-substitute of Orkney, 'to receive and grant receipts for it'. He called first on the proprietor of Quoyloo, Mr Irvine, who showed him 'a lot of very fine Silver Torcs and other articles which had been given up to him by his Tenant who was one of the finders', one William Brass who was subsequently rewarded with £9 after he had delivered them up to Petrie in Kirkwall on 20 March. By the time he left Irvine, 'it was nearly dark and a heavy rain', but Petrie 'pushed on over ploughed fields and broken ground' to visit three farmers who were amongst the main finders – David Smith, James Irvine and David Moar – from all of whom he collected silver to a total weight of about 10 lbs<sup>7</sup> in return for receipts and payments on account from his own pocket 'according to the quantity of silver given up'.<sup>8</sup>

Petrie commented, in his letter of 18 March to John Stuart, that he feared that 'they had disposed of or perhaps converted a good deal previously, not expecting to be remunerated – but I expect to recover some more from them', and the proprietor, writing to Petrie on 19 March, questioned

very much if they have been honest in delivering up their findings to you that day you were in this quarter. I mentioned to the Sheriff that I had heard that the weight of Smith and Irvine's findings was 5 lbs each, they said so to myself – now you will see how far that corresponds with what you got from them.

Moar's receipt was for 'somewhere about 3 lbs 2 oz' of silver so that Smith and Irvine must have delivered up to Petrie a total weight of between 6 and 8 lbs (see note 7), which suggests that there need not have been any such dishonesty as the proprietor implied, for Smith had told Petrie that, not knowing the value of his finds, he had at first 'left them within reach of his children, and of parties who came to see them & he thought some of the things had gone missing'. Then on 18 March Smith wrote to Petrie concerning the articles 'lost in consequence of my little boy getting at them and scattering them about our Garden', for he was 'happy to say that all of them or nearly so have been found'. 'Six armlets' were subsequently delivered to Petrie in Kirkwall on 20 March, but there was 'a pin which is still yet lost'.

Petrie also obtained material from other sources. On 16 March, for instance, he received from Dr William Watt a coin of Æthelstan, a Viking coin of York and 'some pieces of Cufic Coins'. His final acquisitions were made on 5 April, the date of his official inventory as published in *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 3 (1857–60), 247–9, when he bought nos 119 and 120 – the complete Cufic

coin and various fragments, including pieces of hack-silver – from J Linklater to whom he had ‘given special instructions to be on the outlook [for coins] and purchase them for me’.

The hoard was then taken to Edinburgh and exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland on 12 April by Professor Aytoun, Sheriff of Orkney (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 3 (1857–60), 107). On 15 April Robertson delivered it to John Henderson, the Queen’s and Lord Treasurer’s Remembrancer, when it was weighed and found to amount to 16 lbs of silver (*ibid*, 249).<sup>9</sup> Nothing more from the Skail hoard was subsequently declared as treasure trove and nothing further from it came into the possession of the Museum until the 1930s when seven objects with its provenance were acquired from two different sources (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 70 (1935–6), 210–12; 72 (1937–8), 130–1); a ‘ball-type’ brooch from the hoard was purchased in 1966 (Corrie 1932; VA II, 132, fig 61; *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 99 (1966–7), 269, no 6).

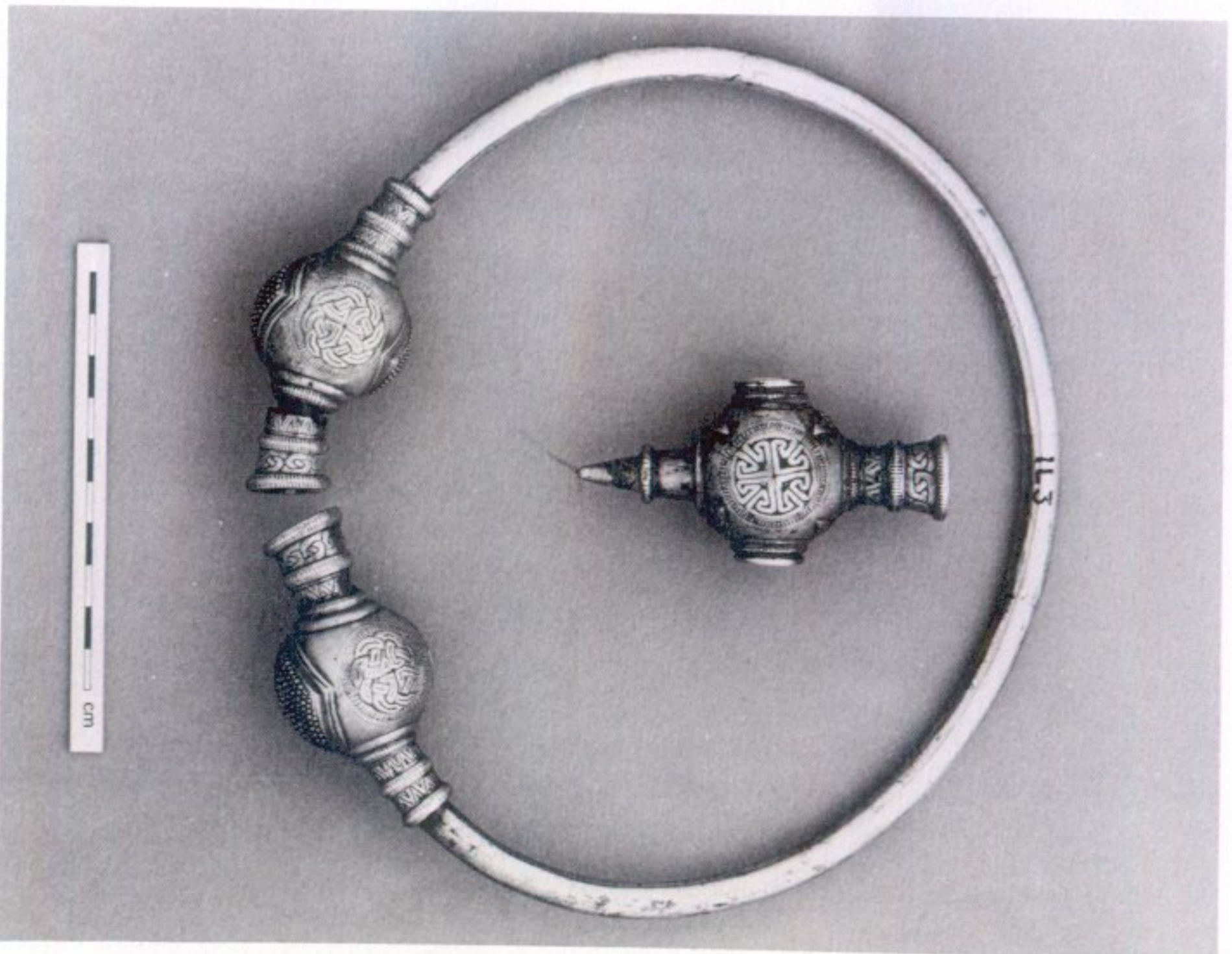
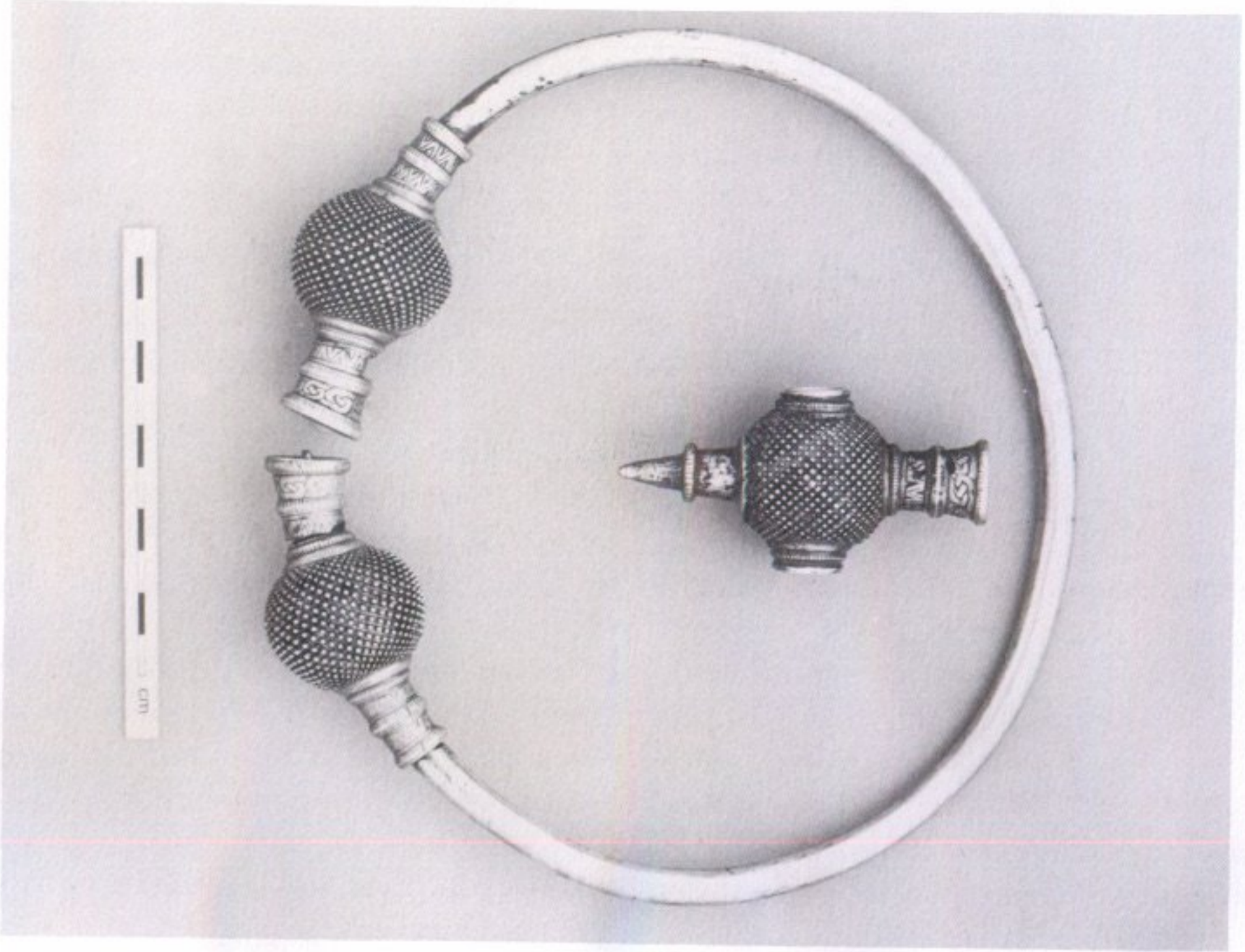
Given the circumstances described above, it is not unreasonable that further items from the Skail hoard may come to light from time to time. One possibility in the present instance is that the two items under discussion were sent in to Robertson after his return from Edinburgh when the treasure trove formalities had been completed so that he was permitted to retain them. The final, and perhaps conclusive, evidence that may be advanced in favour of provenancing these pieces to the Skail hoard arises from detailed analyses of the incised decoration on the complete pin and the form, size, technique and ornament of the separate pin-head which suggest that it was made for the Skail ‘thistle-brooch’ registered as IL3 which is lacking its pin.

#### THE DECORATION

Brooch IL3 (illus 4 & 5) is to be identified with no 4 in Petrie’s Inventory where it is described as ‘A large broken Ring Brooch or Fibula, with richly ornamented bulbous ends’ (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 3 (1857–60), 248). The reason for Petrie’s description of this brooch as ‘broken’ is clear from the earliest of his draft inventories (listing nos 1–54 only, but including weights and measurements) where it is sketched in the margin with its hoop in two pieces, broken at a point corresponding to a repair to the hoop of IL3 which must have been undertaken by the Museum (the terminals have also been repaired). It is not surprising therefore that the pin-head of IL3 should have become separated in the hoard from the rest of the brooch.

The form and size of the new pin-head at once suggest that it belongs to IL3 (illus 4 & 5). In particular, it is rounded like the terminals, although slightly less globular in form, with the same arrangement and size of mouldings around its pin-top as around the outer hoop-collars of the terminals. This exact match between the form and ornament of these brooch extremities – pin-head (opening diameter: 110–20 mm). The lay-out of the ornament is the same, both in general, with a ‘brambled’ front and roundel of incised decoration on the reverse, as well as in particular, there being identical interlace above the same type of chevron-band, separated by the same type of transversely hatched, angular moulding on the pin-top as on the outer hoop-collars of the terminals. This exact match between the form and ornament of these brooch extremities provides a convincing enough argument for the identification of the new pin-head with IL3, but further common details can be advanced in its support, such as the nature of the compass-drawn and hatched borders to the roundels on the reverses. Finally, the same high quality of diagonally cross-filed ‘brambling’ is to be found on both the pin-head and the terminals, although that on the terminals displays a somewhat sinuous arrangement arising from their more rounded form and the larger areas treated. Bearing in mind also the silver analyses presented above, there can be no serious doubt that this pin-head is that made for IL3 which became separated from it in the hoard as a result of its broken hoop; if its shaft was also present, it has yet to come to light.

The form of the pin-head of the new complete pin may be closely paralleled in the Skail

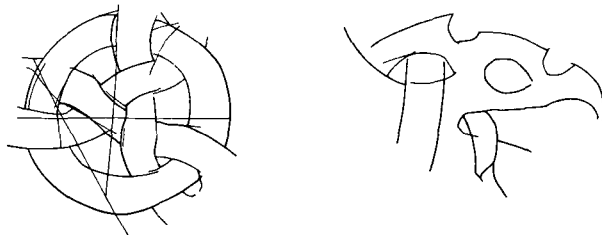


ILLUS 4 & 5 Hoop and terminals of a 'thistle-brooch' from the Skail hoard, Orkney (IL3), with the new pin-head (IL841) attributed to it



hoard on the brooch registered as IL4 (VA II, 121, fig 60, top right). Both are socketed and have plain rounded fronts with flat reverses. Both have everted pin-tops, although that of IL4 is much more strongly developed. The form and lay-out of their pin-top mouldings are also similar. It is not impossible therefore that both pin-heads are from the same workshop, although one must doubt whether the pin-head of IL4 is original to that brooch, given that it is small and plain in comparison to its massive 'brambled' terminals.

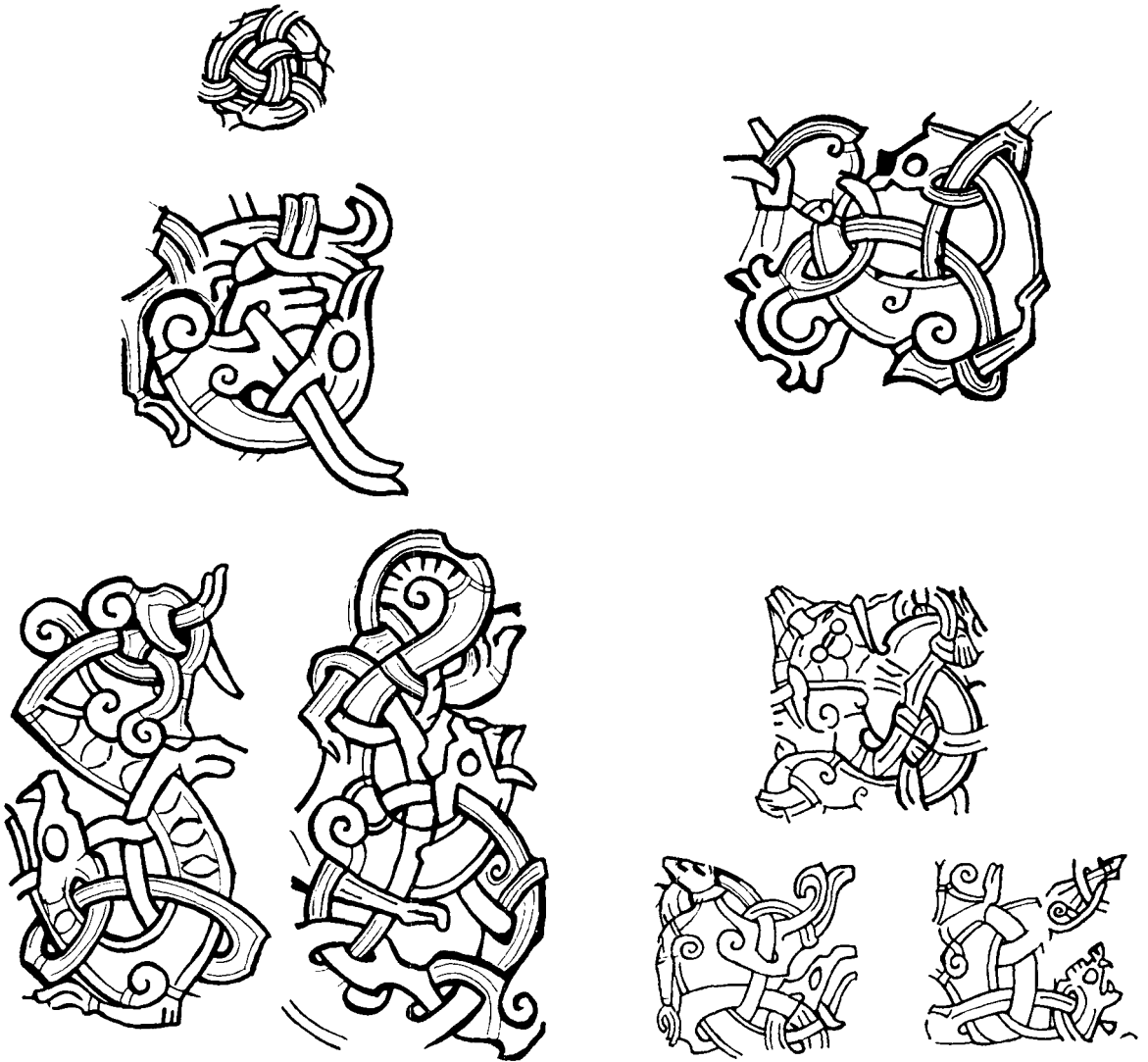
The knot ornament on the reverse of the new pin-head, consisting of a triquetra intertwined with a ring (illus 6), is matched on the pin-tops of brooches IL1 (illus 7, top left) and IL7, both of which display the Jellinge/Mammen-style animal-ornament discussed below as providing the closest parallels for the animal-head sketched on its front. A related ring-knot is also found in the Skaill hoard on the detached pin-top IL65. There are three incised lines in addition to those of the ring-knot on the reverse of the new pin-head of which two are shallow and cross at approximately a right-angle at the centre of the roundel. Microscopic examination ( $\times 10$ ) showed that these underlie the ring-knot and so might have been intended as marking-out lines for the design, although the knot itself is off-centre. The third line, which is deeper, is secondary to the ring-knot which it crosses obliquely.



ILLUS 6 Incised ornament on a silver pin-head believed to be from the Skaill hoard, Orkney (scale 2:1)

The lightly incised animal-head on the front of the new pin-head is positioned to one side, pointing upwards, with enough space left for a body, suggesting that it is an unfinished sketch. A similarly scratched animal-head is to be found on one terminal of the Scaill brooch IL9 (VA II, 123, no 9; VA VI, 238, fig 78). However, its form is exactly paralleled by animal-heads in the finished ornament on brooches IL1 and IL5. The new head (illus 6) is characterized by being in profile with open jaws and downward projecting tongue, a beak-like end to its upper jaw, a notched forehead, a prominent oval eye and a head (or ear) lappet, with a notched base, which loops around its neck. Animals with heads displaying all these features are present on both terminals of IL1 and on the left-hand terminal of IL5 (illus 7); the first two examples demonstrate that the beak-like effect of the upper jaw on the new head (like that on IL5) is a simplified rendering of a single large tooth.

It has previously been suggested that the ornament of IL1 and IL5 is the work of the same craftsman (Graham-Campbell 1976, 121); there can be little doubt that this new animal-head is also from the same hand. The arguments for suggesting that he worked on the Isle of Man, or was at least trained there, have recently been restated (Graham-Campbell 1983b, 70–1). It is also worth noting that one of the closest parallels for the ornament of the new separate pin-head is to be found on one of the two from the Manx hoard buried c 975 at Ballaquayle (Douglas); the only other close parallel is provided by that found near Urlingford, Co Kilkenny (Graham-Campbell 1983b, 70, figs 8 & 10).



ILLUS 7 Incised ornament from 'ball-type' brooches in the Skaill hoard, Orkney (left: brooch IL1; top right: terminal IL5; bottom right: brooch IL7) (Scale 1:1)

It is to be hoped that the arguments advanced above, when taken together, demonstrate beyond all reasonable doubt that the pin and pin-head published here derive from the 1858 Skaill (Orkney) hoard. In any case, it should be evident that they have sufficient notable features to be of considerable intrinsic interest for the student of Viking-age silver in general and of 'ball-type' brooches in particular.

#### NOTES

- 1 Analyses nos F0595B, F0596B, F0786B and F0788B (complete pin) and F0747B-751B, F0773B-774B, F0787B & SEM (separate pin-head), undertaken on 24 June 1982. I am most grateful to Dr Jim Tate for permission to publish his results and quote from his comments.

- 2 The fullest account of the discovery in print which I have been able to locate is that quoted in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1858), 542, from *John O'Groat Journal* for 24 April 1858.
- 3 The text given here is taken from Petrie's draft with his deletions omitted and contractions expanded, for the final version (SAS 378,2) could not be located in December 1983.
- 4 The original finder may be identified as David Linklater for it was to him that Petrie issued a receipt for the 'one silver hook' (amongst other items: see note 6) referred to subsequently by Petrie in this 'Notice'. Linklater is also mentioned as 'the discoverer' by the proprietor in his letter of 19 March to Petrie.
- 5 'Between the Parish Church and the Burn of "Rin"' (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 3 (1857-60), 247); that is the Burn of Snusgar (RCAMS 1946, 270).
- 6 No 49: 'A Hook, with ring in its head' (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 3 (1857-60), 249) which is in fact a plain-ringed, polyhedral-headed ringed-pin (Fanning 1983, 327, 336, no 18). Linklater's other finds, according to Petrie's receipt of 20 March, were 'two silver armlets', 'one head of pin' and 'five fragments of coins etc'.
- 7 Petrie's 'Notice' refers to 'between 10 & 11 lbs avoird.', but in his letter to Stuart he mentioned '9 or 10 lbs weight'.
- 8 The three payments are given, in Petrie's letter to Stuart, as £2-10s, £2-10s and £2, although he does not specify who received what. From the figures discussed subsequently above, it must be Smith and Irvine who received £2-10s each (having surrendered between them 6 to 8 lbs of silver, whereas Moar's receipt was for 'somewhere about 3 lb 2 oz').
- 9 With the additional objects now known, it is clear that the Skail hoard will have been of the order of 8 kg in weight which means that is of an equivalent size to the largest Viking-age silver hoards from Scandinavia (Graham-Campbell 1976, 119 & note 20).

## APPENDIX

### A LOST SILVER OBJECT FROM OXTRO BROCH, BIRSAV, MAINLAND, ORKNEY

One of George Petrie's notebooks, preserved in the library of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, contains the following entry, dated 18 May 1866 (SAS 541, p 73):

Told this evening by Mr Ross Road Contractor that about           ago he being in Birsay, went to the ruins of the Broch of Okstro and went down into the hole (the well as I understood) and groping about among the rubbish he picked up several pieces of Deer's horn, and also a piece of Silver of a cylindrical form about 2½ inches long and about ¾ of an inch in diameter with a hollow or cavity in one end about a quarter of an inch deep. This piece of Silver was very smooth round and finely polished but had no engraving or carving on it. He sold it to Mr Morgan Watchmaker for 2/8 or 2/9.

This note formed the basis for Petrie's description of this piece of silver published in his paper on Orkney brochs (1874, 87), of which a manuscript version is preserved in another of his notebooks (SAS 542, pp 44-60, see p 56). In this he likened it to 'the head of a walking-stick', presumably meaning a silver-topped cane. It does not seem to have been the subject of any subsequent comment or discussion.

The broch of Oxtro was excavated in 1873 (Petrie 1874, 76-8, 86-7; *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 11 (1874-6), 81-6) when it was discovered to be overlain by cist graves, one of which had a covering stone incised with the figure of an eagle. one of the finds was a plain-ringed, loop-headed bronze ringed-pin (VA II, 149, fig 67; Fanning 1983, 336, no 13), with no recorded context; it is most probably of Viking-age date, in the light of Fanning's conclusion that 'the ringed pin spread to Scotland [from Ireland] as part of a general diffusion of Viking fashions in dress ornament arising out of the movement in trade and settlement' (1983, 330). Morris has recently commented (1983, 121) that we have at the broch of Oxtro, as at the nearby site of Saevær Howe where a Late Norse cemetery overlay Viking-age buildings superimposed on buildings of the Pictish period (*ibid*, 140-1), 'a complex site with a mound over an earlier structure (broch) used as a burial-ground presumably in the pre-Norse period, although conceivably in the Viking period'. The broch of Oxtro cemetery could in part at any rate be of Viking-age date, if the eagle-incised slab is interpreted as being a reused Pictish stone (with the additional possibility that the ringed pin was derived from a grave), but even if it is not, the ringed pin is suggestive of some Norse presence or activity on the site.

The majority of the plain-ringed, loop-headed ringed-pins from Scotland, where contexts are known, are from Viking graves (Fanning 1983, 325)).

The context of the brooch of Oxtro silver object suggests therefore that it is most likely to be of Roman, Pictish or Viking-age date (cf the Pictish and Viking treasure – as well as probable Viking graves – from the Broch of Burgar, Evie, Mainland, Orkney: Graham-Campbell, forthcoming). Its form is sufficiently distinctive – a rod with a socketed end – for it to be suggested here that it had been the upper part of the pin-shaft of a large ‘ball-type’ brooch of the type made to be fitted on to the tenon of a pin-head similar to that discussed above as being from the Skaill hoard (cf the complete socketed pin-shaft in the Ballaquayle (Douglas) hoard, Isle of Man, deposited c 975: Graham-Campbell 1983b, 66, fig 8). (The top of the Ballaquayle pin-shaft measures 10 mm ( $\frac{3}{8}$  in) in diameter compared to the dimensions of ‘about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch’ (c 20 mm) quoted for the brooch of Oxtro object, as recalled by its finder. Its size may well have become exaggerated in his memory, although it should be noted that the pin-shaft which would have been inserted into the socket of the massive ‘ball-type’ pin-head from near Urlingford, Co Kilkenny, would have been nearly 15 mm in diameter (VA III, 131, fig 90)). The brooch of Oxtro object may thus tentatively be added to the corpus of Viking-age hack-silver from the Northern Isles.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Dr Joanna Close-Brooks, then of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, for the invitation to publish these pieces, and to Mr Trevor Cowie for his assistance in so doing; Miss Alison Fraser, Orkney archivist, provided me with details of the Robertson family from whom they were acquired. Sir David Wilson, Mrs Leslie Webster and Miss Olwyn Owen (who is engaged on a detailed study of the Viking-age hoards from the Northern Isles) kindly read and commented on my text, but are not to be held responsible for any errors or the conclusions. Illus 6 is by Miss Helen Jackson and illus 7 by Lady Wilson (after drawings by Miss F Carson and myself). Illus 1–5 were provided by, and are the copyright of, the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.

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