

ART. VI. – *The Viking-Age silver hoard from Scotby: the non-numismatic element.*

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IN 1855 a silver hoard was discovered by labourers cutting a field drain at Scotby, three miles from Carlisle. The initial reports are unfortunately incomplete and vague. An article in the *Carlisle Journal* mentioned only twenty coins,<sup>1</sup> while Bateman's account later in the year described twenty-one coins, noting, however, that many others had been found, apparently passing into numerous hands.<sup>2</sup> One of the people who obtained part of the hoard was William Forster of Carlisle. He exhibited an unknown number of coins and some ingots from the hoard to the Archaeological Institute in 1859. In the catalogue entry he supplied the information that ten or twelve ingots, resembling those from Cuerdale, and with a combined weight of 6 oz., 16 dwts., 9 grs. [= 212.09 grams], were found with c. 100 coins, and nearby to a small iron horseshoe and small iron bill-hook.<sup>3</sup>

About 70 of the coins have been tracked down by Christopher Blunt, who postulated a deposition date of 935-940 for the hoard.<sup>4</sup> None of the ingots has appeared in the literature and all were long feared lost. However, a parcel of "ingots" from the Scotby hoard was bought by the Carlisle Museum in 1935 from the sale of the Houghton Hall estate, and for years was kept in storage. Only recently have these objects been rediscovered and put on display.<sup>5</sup>

The Houghton Hall parcel contained 10 silver objects (Plate 1), all termed ingots, though in fact four of the fragments are rods, one probably from a ring, the other three too small to determine their original function. All share the accession number 78-1935.32.

### Ingots

(A) Complete ingot, originally trapezoidal in section with some hammering top and bottom. Traces of abrasive cleaning; at least five nicks. Length 69.9 mm, max. width 10.2 mm, max. thickness 7.0 mm; weight 35.21 grams.

(B) Fragmentary ingot, broken one end, D-shaped section. Blackened, with some evidence of abrasive cleaning on bottom. Cross-hatch impressions visible on top and bottom, probably from a vice; at least five nicks. Length 29.0 mm, max. width 11.8 mm, max. thickness 7.9 mm; weight 15.57 grams.

(C) Fragmentary ingot, cut one end, D-shaped section. Blackened with traces of abrasive cleaning; at least seven nicks. Length 22.6 mm, max. width 6.1 mm, max. thickness 7.4 mm; weight 9.93 grams. Fragments B and C form a single ingot, although the bending and rough break may have resulted in some silver loss.

(D) Fragmentary ingot, cut one end, D-shaped section, blackened; at least three nicks. Length 32.1 mm, max. width 14.2 mm, max. thickness 7.5 mm; weight 20.82 grams.

(E) Fragmentary ingot, cut one end, D-shaped section. Abrasive cleaning in places, elsewhere blackened; at least one nick. Length 38.2 mm, max. width 11.5 mm, max. thickness 9.3 mm; weight 24.15 grams.



PLATE I. – Scotby Hoard: non-numismatic silver (top row from left: J, H, F, D bottom row from left: I, G, E, C, B, A).

(F) Fragmentary ingot, cut both ends, trapezoidal section. Blackened, with some traces of abrasive cleaning; at least four nicks. Length 18·7 mm, max. width 15·0 mm, max. thickness 10·1 mm; weight 23·05 grams.

### Rods

(G) Fragmentary rod, probably from a ring, cut both ends, rhombic section, hammered all sides, bent with some cracking. Some scraping; at least three nicks. Length at present 44·1 mm, max. width and thickness 10 mm; weight 42·01 grams.

(H) Fragmentary rod, cut both ends, lozenge section with edges hammered to produce uneven eight-sided section. Some scraping, blackening; at least three nicks. Length 40·7 mm, max. width 7·2 mm, max. thickness 6·9 mm; weight 17·42 grams.

(I) Fragmentary rod, cut both ends, circular section, hammered near cuts, slightly twisted. Blackened with traces of abrasive cleaning. Length at present 22·4 mm, max. width 9·5 mm, max thickness 8·3 mm; weight 12·76 grams.

(J) Fragmentary rod, cut both ends, square section, hammered all sides. Bent with cracks at bend, tapers slightly; at least one nick. Length 31·9 mm, max. thickness 6·8 mm; weight 9·91 grams.

The number of objects, together with their combined weight of 210·83 grams, suggested the likelihood that this was the collection which Forster exhibited, a hypothesis which became certain when it was discovered that Houghton Hall had been the home of William Forster. If Forster's account is correct, these objects then constitute the entire non-numismatic silver from the hoard. The ingot now in two pieces (B and C) may well have been broken after its discovery, for the cross-hatching is strongly suggestive of a modern vice and the rough break is atypical for ingots of this period; these more often have a deep clean groove, perhaps formed by a chisel, struck at least through half the thickness, before the ingot was snapped in two.

All the objects have been analysed for metal content by X-ray Fluorescence as part of a project testing the metal content of ingots from north-western English and Scottish hoards, undertaken by the author and Dr J. Tate of the Royal Museum of Scotland Research Laboratories. Preliminary results indicate a fairly high silver content for these Scotby ingots and rods, though with different concentrations of other trace elements. It is even possible that the ring fragment G and rod fragment J are from the same batch of silver, or perhaps even formed part of the same object.

As a collection the ingots do resemble those from Cuerdale as Forster stated, but only insofar as the Cuerdale hoard contained over 400 ingots of almost every conceivable type.<sup>6</sup> The number of find spots of silver ingots in England, Scotland and Wales is small, and almost entirely comprised of hoard finds. The total number of ingots, however, is reasonably large, again thanks to the Cuerdale find. Of the seven Viking-Age finds with ingots from England and Wales, six are from the north, and four of these (Cuerdale, Lancs., deposited *c.* 905, Chester (Castle Esplanade) *c.* 965, Bangor, Wales, *c.* 925, and the Scotby hoard) are from the north-west. Silver ingots are also a common tenth-century find in Irish hoards,<sup>7</sup> and to a lesser extent Scottish hoards,<sup>8</sup> usually found in hoards of Scandinavian character.

The one identifiable object, the ring fragment, is also at home in this distribution. The Scotby example is too fragmentary to determine whether it derives from the distinctive class of penannular "ring money" identified by Graham-Campbell;<sup>9</sup> if so, it represents the earliest coin-dated appearance in Britain or Ireland. It is more likely that the ring, when complete, resembled some of the closed arm-rings found in the Cuerdale hoard and which Graham-Campbell sees as prototypes of true "ring money".<sup>10</sup>

The context in which a hoard of Anglo-Saxon coins and ingot and rod fragments came to be deposited outside Carlisle around 935-940 is a difficult question. Historical evidence sheds little light on pre-Conquest Cumbria in general or Carlisle in particular, and archaeological evidence has not filled the gap to any appreciable amount.<sup>11</sup> The political affiliations of Carlisle are especially enigmatic, at the fringes of Anglo-Saxon, Strathclyde, and Scottish influence, yet by its position quite likely affected by Viking activity, which could have been from Dublin, York, the Isle of Man, or the Western Isles, if not direct.

All indications available suggest tenth-century Carlisle to have been an unimportant and relatively poor settlement, if that. In part this conclusion rests on negative evidence, for despite a number of excavations in recent years, no traces of tenth-century occupation have been found, and finds from this period are almost non-existent.<sup>12</sup> Even casting further afield, the profusion of sculpture which at the least suggests an affluent class able to commission artisans, is noticeably scarcer in northern Cumbria, so much so that a possible Strathclyde expansion southwards in this period has been postulated.<sup>13</sup>

Given such limited evidence, it is difficult to speculate on the economic nature of the region. In the first half of the tenth-century, with its political insecurity and fluctuations of power in north-western England, together with the pressures from settling Scandinavians and the political aspirations of Strathclyde and Scotland to the north, it is difficult to envisage how a coined-metal economy, which depends on relatively stable royal control, could have functioned. Such a situation would only have occurred if Carlisle were firmly part of the Anglo-Saxon economy, an economy which should have excluded foreign coin and the use of non-numismatic silver. The ingots and rod fragments had, however, been in circulation, as indicated not only by their fragmentary nature, but also the nicking, presumably done to check purity, and characteristic of the treatment of bullion in a metal weight economy. Where this circulation took place and where the coins were joined with the non-numismatic elements is, of course, impossible to determine, though one would expect outside Anglo-Saxon circles.

On the other hand, the numismatic part of the hoard is atypical in many aspects from other northern hoards. The known coins are entirely Anglo-Saxon,<sup>14</sup> a significant point if they characterise accurately the original hoard (and the inadequacy of the original find accounts must be acknowledged) since all other hoards of this period from the north-west, including those with ingots, contain a mixture of Anglo-Saxon, foreign, and Viking Northumbrian issues.<sup>15</sup> The absence of the latter is particularly striking, and suggests that the coins came from an Anglo-Saxon milieu, perhaps from Chester, since the coins are predominantly from here where their mint can be determined.<sup>16</sup> How and why this parcel of Anglo-Saxon coins came to Cumbria is an interesting (and unsolvable) question. If one assumes a yet undiscovered community in Carlisle, perhaps trade to the south is the answer. Or maybe the coins were the property of a trader himself, perhaps passing over the Pennines.

The silver need not represent the property of a trader or landowner, however. The first half of the tenth-century was a troubled time, with large sums changing hands as ransoms<sup>17</sup> and booty.<sup>18</sup> The few historical references available suggest that some of this unrest occurred either within Cumbria, or in areas requiring passage through the region. In 927 Athelstan obtained the submission of all the kings of Britain, including West Wales, Gwent, Northumbria, Bamburgh, Scotland, and probably Strathclyde, at Eamont in Cumbria.<sup>19</sup> The 930's in particular witnessed some troubled times in the north as some of these kings rebelled. In 934 Athelstan is said to have mounted a land and sea attack into Scotland, followed by the still unplaced battle of *Brunanburh* in 937 involving English, Scots, and Norse, including some said to have retreated to Dublin.<sup>20</sup>

The correlation of troubled times and hoards is intuitively obvious, although one must beware linking hoards too firmly to known events, especially when our historical knowledge remains so patchy. Whether in fact a direct connection exists or not, it is most unlikely that northern Cumbria was unaffected by the situation in the north in these years. The small Scotby hoard remains one of the few tantalising indications of the complex political and economic situation in tenth-century northern Cumbria.

## Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> *Carlisle Journal* for 29 June 1855.

- <sup>2</sup> W. Bateman, "List of a portion of the Anglo-Saxon coins found, in June 1855, by labourers cutting a field drain at Scotby, near Carlisle", *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 11 (1855), 350-1.
- <sup>3</sup> Quoted in C. E. Blunt, "The Scotby hoard", *British Numismatic Journal*, 42, (1974), 156.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.
- <sup>5</sup> I would like to thank Colin Richardson, Keeper of Archaeology at the Carlisle Museum and Art Gallery for permission to examine the objects, have them analysed by XRF, and for many background details concerning the ownership of Houghton Hall and previous finds from Carlisle. I would also like to thank James Graham-Campbell and Deirdre O'Sullivan for reading and commenting on drafts of this paper.
- <sup>6</sup> The analysis of Viking-Age silver ingots from England and Wales forms the topic of a Ph.D. in progress by the author at University College London.
- <sup>7</sup> James Graham-Campbell, "The Viking-age silver hoards of Ireland", in B. Almqvist and David Greene (eds.), *Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Congress*, (Dublin 1976), 66-8; Michael Ryan *et al.*, "Six silver finds of the Viking period from the vicinity of Lough Ennell, Co. Westmeath", *Peritia* 3, (1984), 334-81.
- <sup>8</sup> J. A. Graham-Campbell, "The Viking-Age silver and gold hoards of Scandinavian character from Scotland". *PSAS* 107, (1975-6), 129-30.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> See *e.g.* the recent surveys by Deirdre O'Sullivan. "Cumbria before the Vikings: a review of some 'Dark Age' problems in north-west England", in John R. Baldwin and Ian D. Whyte (eds.), *The Scandinavians in Cumbria*, (Edinburgh, 1985), 17-35; and Nick Higham, "The Scandinavians in north Cumbria: raids and settlement in the later ninth to mid tenth centuries", in *ibid.*, 37-51.
- <sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Mike McCarthy for unpublished information concerning excavations in Carlisle.
- <sup>13</sup> By *e.g.* Richard Bailey, "Aspects of Viking-Age sculpture in Cumbria", in J. Baldwin and I. Whyte *op. cit.*, 55-7.
- <sup>14</sup> See also C. Blunt, *op. cit.*, 156-7 for the possibility that the hoard may have contained some St Edmund or St Peter coins.
- <sup>15</sup> R. H. M. Dolley, *The Hiberno-Norse Coins in the British Museum*, (London, 1966), 49-50.
- <sup>16</sup> C. Blunt, *op. cit.*, 157.
- <sup>17</sup> *E.g.* *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 914. Dorothy Whitlock (editor and translator), *English Historical Documents I c.500-1042*, 2nd ed., (London, 1979). Hereafter abbreviated to ASC.
- <sup>18</sup> ASC 917.
- <sup>19</sup> ASC (D).
- <sup>20</sup> ASC 934, 937.

