

NOTES ON LATE SAXON PINS FROM TICKNALL, AND LITTLE CHESTER

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The Ticknall pin

A silver-gilt pin was found by a metal detector user, Mr C. Kirby, in a field near Ticknall in 1986. The pin was brought to Derby Museum for identification, and has been deposited on loan to the museum by Mr Kirby (accession no. 1986-L409). The find was reported to H. M. coroner who determined that it was not Treasure Trove. The writer is grateful for references suggested by Mrs Leslie Webster of the British Museum.

Description (Fig. 1, Plate 1)

The pin has a globular head on a slightly bent shaft; the lower half of the shaft is missing. The fragment is 30mm long, and the diameter of the head is 12mm. The original length was probably some 70mm. A small wire loop is soldered to the underside of the head at its junction with the shaft.

The head is presumably hollow and constructed in two halves soldered together. The junction is concealed by an applied silver wire joined at its ends with a silver granule. The head is ornamented with applied twisted wire filigree and silver granules. On the upper half there are three discontinuous circles, on the lower half four, each containing a trefoil of smaller circles with a granule at the centre. The remaining spaces are filled by granules set in collars of twisted wire: four collars around the neck of the shaft; one in each of the spandrels between the circles on the lower half; and two between each of the circles on the upper half. There is a collar at the top of the head where a granule has been lost, and a granule is also missing from one of the trefoils on the upper half. Three other collars lack any traces of granules. One granule on the lower half has trailed while still molten and there are several disconnected fragments of wire on the surface of the pin. The head of the pin, the loop at its base and the neck of the shaft have been gilded, but most of the gilding has worn away from the raised surfaces. The filigree has been worn smooth and the pin appears to have been old when it was lost.

Discussion

Several pins of the type are known in England. The Ticknall pin is similar in design to silver-gilt pins from Marlborough, Wiltshire (Robinson, 1981) and Ash, Kent (Hinton, 1974: 9; Waterman, 1948). These are ornamented with encircled trefoils executed in punched wire filigree. Bronze pins from Castor, Northamptonshire (Leeds, 1950) and Peterborough, Cambridgeshire (Cambridge University Museum) are of a similar pattern. Reference may also be made to silver-gilt pins from London (Robinson, 1981), Goathurst Common, Kent (Robinson, 1981), and Sawdon, North Yorkshire (Waterman, 1948), each of which has large open circles without trefoils, the treatment of the circles being different in each case. Both the Ash and Sawdon pins have loops soldered to the top of the shaft.

All these pins have an equatorial division marked by either a broad flat band or a double line of imitation filigree, formed from the outturned edges of the two halves of the head. The Ticknall pin is unique in having the equatorial line marked by a plain applied wire and a granule.

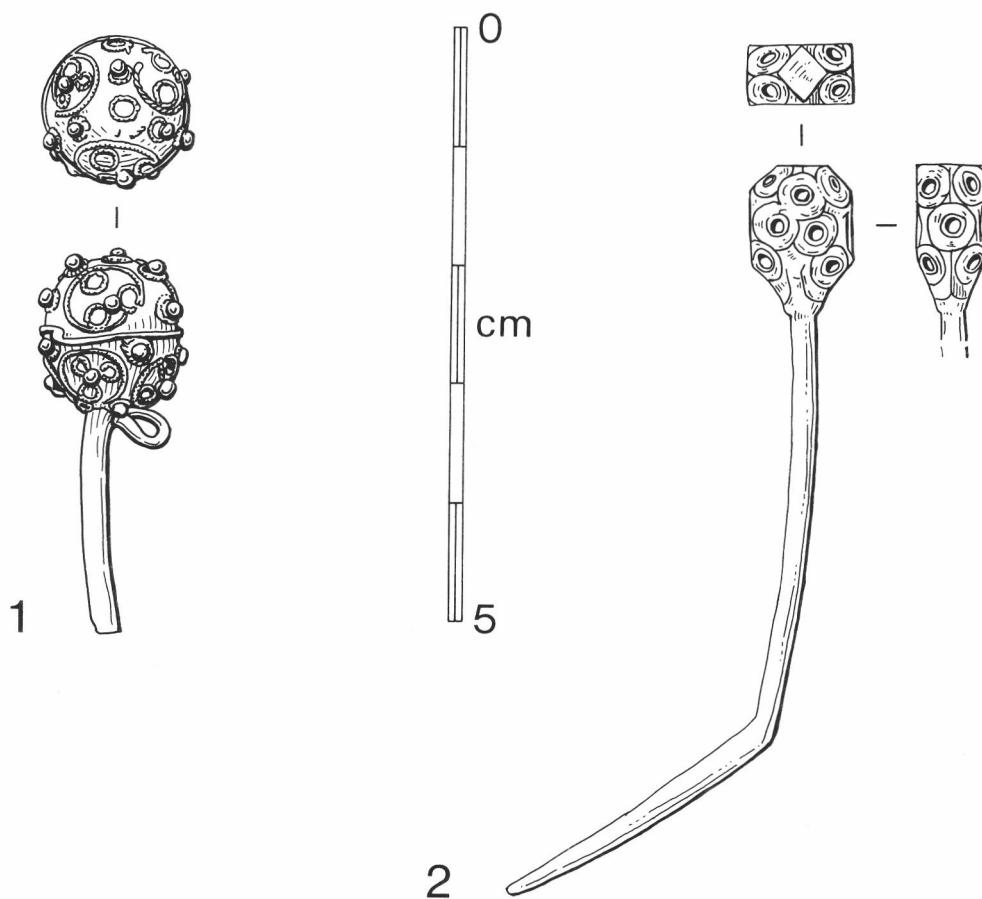


Fig. 1 Notes on late Saxon pins. 1: the Ticknall pin; 2: the Little Chester pin.

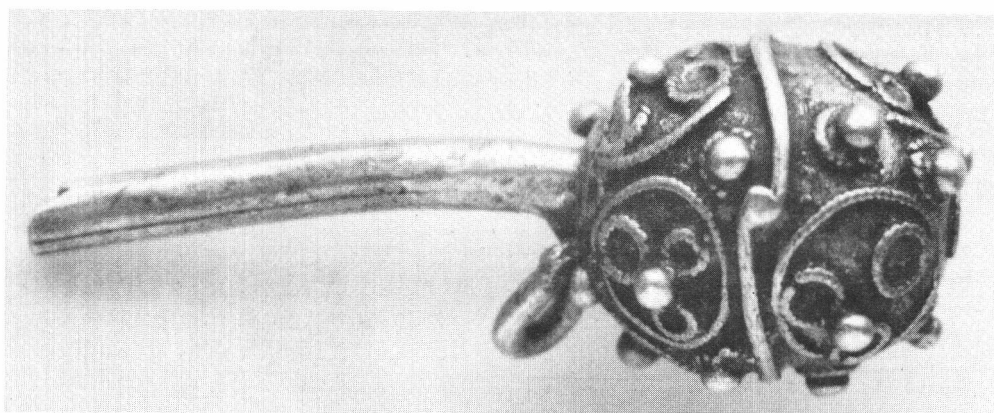


Plate 1 Notes on late Saxon pins: the Ticknall pin.

Neither the Ticknall pin nor any of those related to it has come from a dateable context. The broad similarity of these pins to spherical-headed pins from North European sites and beads from Viking contexts in Scandinavia and Britain, both types decorated with filigree in spiral motifs has been discussed by Robinson (1981: 57-58). Two pins from Dorestad were deposited before 875, possibly in the first half of the ninth century (Robinson, 1981: 59). Three beads with filigree spirals have been excavated at Repton, only three miles from the Ticknall findspot, in a grave post-dating the mass burial attributed to 873-4 (Biddle, 1987: 12). A filigree bead came from the Tanotrie hoard concealed c. 875 (Maxwell, 1912: 14; Dolley 1966: 49), but such beads continued to be included in Danish hoards in the latter half of the tenth century (Waterman, 1948: 182). These parallels are sufficient to suggest a date in the later-ninth or tenth centuries for pins of the Ticknall type.

Although the Scandinavian parallels suggest an Anglo-Danish origin (Hinton, 1974: 9), it has been claimed that the numbers of pins found in the south of England indicate an Anglo-Saxon context (Robinson, 1981: 58-59). The discovery of this fine example within the Danelaw might strengthen the hypothesis of an Anglo-Danish source.

Little Chester

Fifteen years have passed since Richard Hall's examination of pre-Conquest Derby (Hall, 1974). Of particular interest was his proposal that Little Chester was the site defended by the Danes in 917, where Aethelflaed's thegns were slain "within the gates" (Whitelock *et al.*, 1965: 64-65). This suggestion was supported by evidence of a late Saxon re-fortification of the south-eastern corner of the Roman defences excavated in 1971-72 (Wilson, 1973: 285; Birss and Wheeler, 1985: 11). Though little new evidence has appeared in the years since Hall's paper, attention should be drawn to a bronze pin in the Derby Museum collection (accession no. 1986-976/SF4).

Description (Fig. 1)

The pin was found in topsoil during the 1979-80 excavations of the north-western quarter of the Little Chester enclosure (Dawson, 1985: 141, fig. 56:21). It has a faceted head of rectangular section decorated with overlapping drilled ring-and-dot motifs.

Discussion

Dawson cites examples of late Roman pins from Colchester and Lankhills (Dawson, 1985: 141). Faceted pins in bronze, bone and jet were being produced after c. AD 250 (Crummy, 1983: 22-23, 27-29). However, these pins have a cuboid rather than rectangular head, and although some have a single ring and dot on each face, most are undecorated. The Little Chester pin has more direct parallels in the ninth century series from Whitby, which includes round, flat and faceted heads with liberal use of the ring and dot motif (Peers and Radford, 1943: 63-64, figs 13, 14). Likewise, there are several variations on the type from York, one almost identical with the Little Chester pin (Waterman, 1959: 78, fig. 11:12). Although an unprovenanced find, the York pin is attributed to a late Saxon or Anglo-Scandinavian milieu.

The Little Chester pin should therefore be added to a small but significant corpus of late Saxon material from the Roman enclosure. Finds from the 1971-72 excavation of the south-eastern defences included an Anglo-Scandinavian bone pin with expanded head (Macgregor, 1985: 120; Sparey-Green, *pers. comm.*), as well as sherds of St. Neots, Stamford and Thetford wares (Birss and Wheeler, 1985: 11). The 1979-80 excavations inside the enclosure produced a fragmentary antler comb of Anglo-Scandinavian type and one sherd of St Neots-type ware (Birss, 1985: 146, fig. 58:18, 19; Wheeler, 1985: 69).

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