

Vikings in the City: a *Ringerike*-style buckle and related artefacts from London

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Archaeological background

IN 1016, LONDON finally succumbed to a protracted series of sieges and attacks by the Danish invaders. From then until 1042, England was part of the territories ruled by the Danish kings Cnut and his sons Harald and Harthacnut. That period therefore saw a renewal of Scandinavian occupation in London. This is represented archaeologically by, for example, significant elements in the occupation sequence recorded on the Guildhall Yard site¹ as well as such famous finds as the *Ringerike*-style tombstone from St Paul's churchyard with a runic inscription inscribed on its edge to record that 'Ginna and Toki had this stone laid'. A number of other items can also be associated with this period; the purpose of this note is to report on one such recent discovery, and to reassess the significance of the other artefacts.

During the DUA excavations of the Thames Exchange site in Upper Thames Street between Feb 1988 and Sept 1989, a *Ringerike*-style buckle was recovered². This multi-period site produced evidence for a complex sequence of Thames-side land reclamation and exploitation³. Notable archaeological features included a 3rd-century Roman quay⁴ and nine phases of Late Saxon and later medieval revetment structures dated by dendrochronology from the 10th to the 14th centuries⁵. In addition, early medieval occupation deposits dating from the Late Saxon period to c. 1150 were discovered during controlled excavation of a 20m strip on the northern edge of the site⁶.

1. N. Bateman *Gladiators at the Guildhall; the story of London's amphitheatre and medieval Guildhall*, MoLAS 2000.
2. TEX 88; MoL ACQ No. 89.336/2.
3. G. Milne *Timber Building Techniques in London c. 900-1400* London Middlesex Archaeol Soc Special Paper 15 (1992) 42-63; *op cit* fn 6, 165-7.
4. J. Parry 'The Roman Quay at Thames Exchange, London' *London Archaeol* 7, no. 10 (1994) 263-8.
5. *Op cit* fn 3.
6. G. Milne 'The Archaeological Context' in *op cit* fn 9, 168.
7. *Ibid*, 167.
8. M. McCall *A Survey of 14 unidentified copper-alloy zoomorphic mounts from the Vintry and Thames Exchange sites*. Institute of Archaeology, University College London, unpublished BA dissertation 1998.
9. M. M. Archibald, J. R. S. Lang & G. Milne 'Four early medieval coin dies from the London waterfront' *Numis Chron* (1995) 165-200.
10. H. Lindsey & P. Webber 'Studying finds from the medieval waterfront' *London Archaeol* 7, no. 5 (1993) 133-40; *op cit* fn 8.
11. *Op cit* fn 6, 167.

The buckle belongs to the significant assemblage of metal-detector finds made by members of the Thames Mudlarks whose role was to survey and recover artefacts from the excavation spoil heaps⁷. The finds display a wide chronological and morphological range, though perhaps most interesting and relevant to the present discussion is a group of Saxo-Norman zoomorphic mounts⁸, and four 11th- to 12th-century coin-dies representing silver penny issues from the reigns of Cnut, William I, Henry I and Stephen⁹. The artefacts recovered from this single site should be viewed within the wider context of excavation and artefact-retrieval from London's waterfront. The wealth of well-preserved material derived from these contexts has fuelled not only major finds syntheses, such as those encapsulated in the museum of London's *Medieval Finds from Excavations* series, but also more specialist reports focusing on single artefact types¹⁰.

The matrix from which the buckle was recovered was removed by machine from one of the large areas lying beyond the limit of the controlled excavations, and the spoil was searched by detectorists off-site. Thus, although the recovery technique associated with the majority of metal-detected finds from the Thames Exchange rescue excavations precluded their attribution to a securely stratified archaeological context, it does at least provide a general site provenance¹¹.

Description

The buckle (Fig. 1) is cast in copper-alloy and is composed of a D-shaped frame with a plain transverse bar which retains the original tapering pin. The overall dimensions of the buckle are 31mm by 28mm. The main part of the frame is in the form of a symmetrical design composed

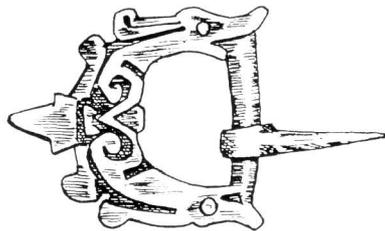


Fig. 1: the Thames Exchange buckle (actual size) (drawn by Matt McCall)

of two profiled animal heads which bite the bar of the buckle. Each head is provided with a circular eye, up-turned snout and swept-back elongated ears or head lappets with lobed terminals. The animals' necks, which curve towards the centre of the frame, are linked by a pair of scrolls, between which is a small triangular recess to receive the pin. Above the scrolls at the apex of the frame, is a centrally placed foliate motif composed of a projecting sub-triangular bud with a central transverse collar, between a pair of lobed tendrils.

Discussion and parallels

Stylistically, the buckle belongs to a growing corpus of material attributable to an English version of the Scandinavian *Ringerike* style current during the first half of the 11th century¹². The style, as practised in a variety of media, including metalwork, bone, stone sculpture and illuminated manuscripts, was surveyed almost 20 years ago¹³. The buckle which forms the subject of this note, however, belongs to a growing corpus of finds made since that study.

Apart from this general stylistic context, the Thames Exchange find has close morphological parallels in a number of buckles characterised by animal heads which bite the transverse bar of the frame¹⁴. This includes three copper-alloy buckles published in Fuglesang's survey. The first, another London find, is from the Thames at Barnes¹⁵, the others are from Denmark, one from Hornum, Ålborg, and another with an unknown provenance in Copenhagen museum¹⁶. Of the three, the Barnes example offers the best parallels (though unfinished, see below), especially the animal heads which share the same curling snouts and elongated ears with lobed terminals. There are differences, however, the Barnes find being substantially broader and, at the apex of the loop, the foliate motif is replaced by a crudely incised triquetra.

The two Danish finds cited by Fuglesang are more degenerate and their features less clearly represented. The dimensions of the Sønderholm example closely match those of the Thames Exchange buckle, as do the animal heads used; however, the terminal of the frame takes the form of a trilobate palmette. The unprovenanced example is described as 'very low quality and devoid of elements that might place it stylistically', though it is sufficiently diagnostic to merit inclusion

under Fuglesang's general heading: 'cast bronze buckle-loops with animal heads biting over the horizontal bar'¹⁷.

In addition to these examples there are several more published finds from England, including an example from the beach site of Meols in Cheshire, which is of similar dimensions and shares the same buckle-frame features, including the characteristic animal heads and centrally disposed foliate motif¹⁸. A lead-alloy example, discovered in a 14th-century waterfront deposit at Billingsgate, London, also belongs to the group¹⁹. Although a residual find and fragmentary, the pairs of characteristic animal heads clearly belong to the same pedigree, an observation which invited comparison with the Barnes find in the published report. A metal-detector find from Merstham, Surrey²⁰, is a further representative, though it is typologically more sophisticated in having an integrally riveted buckle-plate instead of a simple horizontal bar. Despite this departure, the characteristic biting animal heads are clearly visible, as is an additional en-face animal mask which acts as the apex to the buckle loop, the latter having parallels elsewhere in the corpus of English *Ringerike*-style metalwork²¹.

More stylised versions exist, including an example excavated in Thetford, Norfolk²², and a metal-detector find from High Easter, Essex²³.

The motifs which characterise the Thames Exchange find and other buckles in the series can be closely paralleled on other *Ringerike*-style artefacts from Scandinavia and England, many of which are included in Fuglesang's survey. The distinctive foliate motif closely resembles the 'union knot' motifs used on 'classic phase' *Ringerike* media such as that on the Söderala vane, the stonecarving on Ramsundsberget, Södermanland, Sweden, and, in a similar positional context, as the terminal on the copper-alloy plaque from the Thames at Hammer-smith²⁴. The spirals used to join the necks of the animal heads, meanwhile, are employed in a wide variety of stylistic contexts, the closest geographical parallel appearing on a fragmentary copper-alloy disc from St Martin le Grand, London²⁵. The profiled animal head with a gaping mouth, curling lips and swept-back scrolled ears or head lappets is also a hallmark of the *Ringerike* style, one of the most confident and accomplished renderings appearing on another local find, the St Paul's grave slab²⁶. The use of circular eyes on the Thames

12. D. M. Wilson & O. Klindt-Jensen *Viking Art* (1966); *op cit* fn 13.

13. S. H. Fuglesang *Some Aspects of the Ringerike Style* (1980).

14. *Ibid.*, 134.

15. *Ibid.*, cat. no. 48, pl. 27C; see also D. M. Wilson *Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork, 700-1100, in the British Museum*, Catalogue of the Antiquities of the Later Saxon Period, I, London 1964.

16. *Ibid.*, pl. 80A and p. 134 respectively.

17. *Ibid.*, 134, Group E.

18. G. Chitty & M. Warhurst 'A Collection of finds from the Cheshire Shore in the Merseyside County Museums' *Journ Merseyside Archaeol Soc* 1 (1977) 19-42, fig. 1, no. 18.

19. A. Vince (ed.) *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London: Finds and Environmental Evidence* London Middlesex Archaeol Soc

Special Paper 12 (1992) 153 no. 121, fig. 336.

20. D. Williams 'Some Recent Finds from East Surrey' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 83 (1996) 165-86, cat. no. 37, fig. 6.

21. See D. Williams *Late Saxon Stirrup-Strap Mounts* CBA Research Report III (1997) Class A, Type 8.

22. A. R. Goodall 'Non-Ferrous Metal Objects' in A. Rogerson & C. Dallas 'Excavations in Thetford 1948-9 and 1973-80' *East Anglian Archaeol* 22 (1984) 68-76, fig. 10, no. 24.

23. M. J. Cuddeford 'Some recent finds of late Anglo-Saxon metalwork from Essex' *Essex Archaeol and Hist* 27 (1996) 319-322, no. 6, fig. 11.

24. *Op cit* fn 13, cat. no. 43; cat. no. 80 and cat. no. 47 respectively.

25. *Ibid.*, cat. no. 51.

26. *Ibid.*, cat. no. 88.

Exchange and Meols animals should be seen as a stylistic anomaly, however, as most heads attributed to the style have almond-shaped examples.

In addition to those objects in Fuglesang's survey, important comparanda of English *Ringerike*-style metalwork are provided by Williams' study of stirrup-strap mounts²⁷. The foliate motif used on the Thames Exchange buckle has close parallels on mounts 202, 357 and 487, all of which combine a central bud above pairs of spiralling tendrils. Similarly the distinctive animal heads belonging to the buckles are closely matched by those on several of the mounts; the dragonesque examples with curling lips and extended ears which appear on mounts 8 and 9 provide the best parallels.

Conclusions

Although the buckle is unstratified, associated archaeological and artefactual evidence increase the likelihood that it is more than an isolated residual find. Dendrochronological dates demonstrate that the site was certainly occupied during the 11th century, and other artefacts, the coin-dies in particular, argue for contemporary activity if not on the site itself, on some other site in the vicinity, arriving with midden material dumped during the process of land reclamation²⁸. This

27. *Op cit* fn 21.

28. *Op cit* fn 9, 198-9.

29. *Op cit* fn 13, cat. nos 2 & 46; 51; 99; 52 & 53; 88; 87; 89; 100; 101 respectively.

combined evidence provides a convincing 11th-century dating horizon into which the buckle fits happily on art-historical grounds.

Ringerike-style artefacts from London

The discussion of this buckle brings into focus the prominence of London and its hinterland in the distribution of material ascribable to the *Ringerike* style. The tally of *Ringerike*-style artefacts from the City now stands at fourteen, the majority representing discoveries made during city development in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition to the three buckles or buckle-fragments discussed above, there are: two inlaid weapons, discovered in the Thames at London Bridge; the St-Martin-le-Grand disc with also a carved bone cylinder or trial-piece from the same site, two gilt copper-alloy mounts from Smithfield; sculptural fragments from St Paul's, All Hallows by the Tower and 'the city of London'; and two bone pins from Leadenhall Street and the Thames, at 'the City of London'²⁹.

This material is best interpreted as a reflection of the cultural and economic importance of London during the period of Danish rule in England during the first half of the 11th century. That London was an important centre for the style outside Scandinavia has already been discussed in relation to stone carving, in the words of Fuglesang 'the three stones in London are of considerable importance since they demonstrate that pure *Ringerike* style carving was being produced there'³⁰.

Letter

Merton Priory

IN ITS TIME Merton Priory was the most important monastic foundation in the realm, where Nicholas Breakespeare studied before going on to be the only English Pope. Thomas A'Becket also studied there and the foundation of our legal system was formulated as *The Articles of Merton* in 1236. Kings and Queens and coronations were all associated with Merton, in fact it seems that Henry VI almost lived there. It was responsible for founding Merton College, Oxford, Merton Hall, Cambridge, and other daughter houses such as Holyrood, Taunton and at least a dozen others.

After its dissolution in April 1538 Henry VIII carried off, it is said, 3600 tons of stone for his new Palace of Nonsuch at nearby Cheam and the remains mouldered away. Some idea of its erstwhile majesty can be gained from the few magnificent carvings salvaged from the Nonsuch excavations now in the Museum of London.

Most of the Priory is now under a Savacentre and associated car parks, although some worthy investigations were done by the Surrey Archaeological Society and the Museum of London in the 1960s, but the full report is still awaited. The Chapter House was saved under a road, in a concrete bunker-like construction, virtually unknown except to those who go looking.

Now there are plans for developing this site, which is unique and of national importance. No doubt the Borough of Merton, on whose shoulders the responsibility seems to rest, cannot alone afford to give the site the respect it deserves.

The developers have produced a model showing a hotel, a Health and Fitness Centre, two restaurants and dwellings, and said that the foundations would still be there for excavation "if ever the site became available". It was not explained how the entrance to the proposed hotel's underground car park or diggings for the sports complex pool would leave things unscathed. There was no mention of how boreholes, pile-driving, ancillary cables, sewage works, water connections, etc., that would be required would affect the site, especially as some are intended for areas never examined before.

As a sop, the developer has planned for a skirt-like canopy to be wrapped around a pylon at the cleaned-up Chapter House as a "Heritage Centre", but there appears to be no security or proper building allowed for this.

Although we cannot save everything, Merton has played such an overwhelming part in the history of our land that surely it merits preservation, and to be made accessible for all? The recent Time Team efforts on Coventry's Old Cathedral shows what can be done and might still be there. If Henry was interested only in the masonry there might be floor tiles, stained glass, burials, etc., discarded and ignored at the time but could be revealing now.

Money must surely be available from the Heritage Fund of the Lottery, or the Millennium Parks Projects. Excavations, restorations, displays, interpretations, models, etc., should be coordinated by English Heritage, as a scheduled ancient monument. Any other civilised country would be glad to have a site of such significance available and show concern. Is it too much to hope that a way can be found to save this national treasure while there is still some heritage to preserve?

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London, SW12.

Furthermore the close stylistic associations between the London carvings and those in Scandinavia have prompted the suggestion that they may have been produced by a community of Scandinavian craftsmen working within the City³¹.

The evidence provided by the closely related group of buckles suggests that the city may have also been home to a workshop specialising in the production of *Ringerike*-style metalwork, a proposition strengthened by the fact that the Barnes example is an unfinished piece³² indicating that 'metalworkers, trained in the style, were at work in London'³³. This workshop attribution is also supported on distributional grounds, for in addition to the three London finds, two of the related buckles discovered outside the City were found within a twenty mile radius of the capital.

This interpretation should be viewed in the wider context of the capital's importance as an economic and manufacturing centre during the Late Saxon and Saxo-Norman periods as demonstrated by a range of archaeological and historical evidence³⁴, not least the coin-dies which demonstrate that London was the base for a centralised die-cutting industry from the 1030s³⁵.

Meanwhile, excavations have revealed evidence for non-ferrous metalworking in the form of such detritus as moulds, ingots and motif-pieces, suggesting that during the Late Saxon and Saxo-Norman periods 'metalworking was widespread throughout the city'³⁶. More rel-

30. *Ibid.*, 64.

31. *Ibid.*, 64.

32. *Ibid.*, 51.

33. J. A. Graham-Campbell 'The End in England' in Roesdahl et al., *The Vikings in England and their Danish Homeland* (1981) 182.

34. See M. K. Lawson *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (1993) 206; P. Nightingale 'The Origin of the Court of Husting and Danish Influence on London's Development into

evant to the present discussion are objects relating to the manufacture of dress-accessories. They includes a tile-mould recovered from an 11th-century context interpreted as being used in the production of Thor's hammers: an additional piece of evidence for the Anglo-Scandinavian milieu that existed in the capital at this time³⁷. Also of note is the hoard of pewter dress-accessories including partly finished beads, rings and disc brooches discovered at Cheapside. This is best interpreted as the contents of a late 11th century jeweller's cache³⁸.

The fact that the only Scandinavian parallels for the buckle come from Denmark is most likely a result of the particularly close links forged between the two countries during Cnut's rule over the joint Anglo-Scandinavian kingdom³⁹. The distinct Anglo-Scandinavian cultural environment fostered by such links is evidenced in a variety of media from both England and Denmark, a notable example being the decoration on a pair of gilt copper-alloy stirrup plates from Velds, Ørum, Viborg, Jutland, which represents an amalgam of Anglo-Saxon Winchester-style and Scandinavian *Ringerike*-style artistic influences⁴⁰.

I wish to acknowledge the work of Matt McCall, who drew the illustration of the buckle, Judy Stephenson (Museum of London) who generously supervised the initial dissertation study and Professor James Graham-Campbell (UCL) for his knowledge and comments.

a Capital City' *Econ Hist Rev* 102 (1987) 559-78; *op cit* fn 19.

35. *Op cit* fn 9, 195.

36. *Op cit* fn 19, 389.

37. *Op cit* fn 19, 167, cat. no. 175.

38. P. R. G. Hornsby, R. Weinstein & R. F. Homer *Pewter: a celebration of the craft* MoL 1989, cat. no. 8.

39. Lawson, *op cit* fn 34.

40. J. Backhouse, D. H. Turner & L. E. Webster (eds) *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art 966-1066* (1984), no. 98.

Excavations and post-excavation work

City of London. Museum of London Archaeology Service, Walker House, 87 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4AB (020 7410 2200).

Croydon & District, processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collection of fabric types, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Enquiries to Jim Davison, 28 Blenheim Park Road, South Croydon, CR2 6BB.

Greater London, by Museum of London Archaeology Service. Excavations and processing in all areas. General enquiries to MOLAS, Walker House, 87 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4AB (020 7410 2200).

Borough of Greenwich. Cataloguing of excavated and other archaeological material, the majority from sites in the borough. For further information contact Greenwich Borough Museum, 232 Plumstead High Street, SE18 1JT (020 8855 3240).

Hammersmith & Fulham, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue

Group. Processing of material from the Borough. Tuesdays, 8.00 p.m.-10 p.m. at Fulham Palace, Bishop's Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, SW6. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 85 Rannoch Road, W6 9SX (020 7385 3723).

Kingston, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society (KUTAS). Processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Thursday (10 a.m.) at the North Kingston Centre, Richmond Road, Kingston upon Thames KT2 5PE. Enquiries 020 8546 5386.

Surrey, by Surrey County Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to Rob Poulton, Archaeological Unit Manager, Old Library Headquarters, 25 West Street, Dorking, RH4 1DE (01306 886 466).

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