

suggest Celtic derivation, such as the spiral ornament on the 8th-century crucifixion plaque from Rinnagan, Co. Westmeath (Fig. 4b).⁵ Spiral ornament on Celtic metalwork, however, usually has expanded ends of almost zoomorphic form, often with trumpet scrolls arranged in confronted pairs or sometimes with a central pelta (composed of three arcs). In contrast the Thorpe Salvin pin has interlocking spirals of virtually constant width and a central concave-sided square containing a circle.

Closer parallels for the spiral motifs appear on the two decorative links from the Witham pin set,⁶ although much simpler in design, and more particularly a fragment probably from Ixworth.⁷ This discoidal object, possibly the head of a linked pin, has spiral decoration (Fig. 4c) and fan-shaped terminals to the cross-arm, but it is poorly provenanced so dating is difficult. A 9th-century date is proposed because of the lobed leaves, which are however quite different in style to the leaf motif in the Thorpe Salvin cross terminals.

The linked pin discovered in S. Yorkshire is a high-quality piece with a well-executed spiral design, a motif which originally derives from native British Celtic ornament. It is, however, more likely that the spiralforn ornament on the Thorpe Salvin pin is an expression of mid 8th-century Mercian art such as the Vespasian Psalter and Stockholm Codex Aureus⁸ which drew inspiration from a wide spectrum of Celtic and Mediterranean artistic sources. It is to this eclectic stylistic tradition that the Thorpe Salvin pin belongs. The lack of any strong parallels make this linked pin an enigmatic example of middle Anglo-Saxon metalwork.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

¹ C. R. Hart, 'Two Late Anglo-Saxon Strap-Ends from South Yorkshire', *Yorkshire Archaeol. J.* 61 (1989), 189–90.

² L. Webster and J. Backhouse (eds.), *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture A.D. 600–900* (London, 1991), 97–98, cat. no. 69i.

³ R. N. Bailey, 'An Anglo-Saxon Pin-head from Pontefract', *Yorkshire Archaeol. J.* 42 (1970), 405–06.

⁴ D. M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork 700–1100 in the British Museum* (London, 1964), 132–34, cat. no. 19.

⁵ S. M. Youngs (ed.), *'The Work of Angels': Masterpieces of Celtic Metalwork, 6th–9th Centuries A.D.* (London, 1989), 140–41, cat. no. 133.

⁶ Wilson, *op. cit.* in note 4.

⁷ D. A. Hinton, *Catalogue of the Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork 700–1100 in the Department of Antiquities* (Ashmolean Museum Oxford, 1974), 24, cat. no. 18.

⁸ For summary and references see Webster and Backhouse, *op. cit.* in note 2, 197–201, cat. nos. 153–54.

A RE-ASSESSMENT OF THE 'GREAT SEPULCHRAL MOUND' CONTAINING A VIKING BURIAL AT DONNYBROOK, DUBLIN (Fig. 5)

Attention was first drawn to the mound at Donnybrook in 1879 in a paper read by William Frazer to the Royal Irish Academy.¹ It has since been commented on by R. A. Hall and H. B. Clarke.² Far from being the site of a mass slaughter accompanying a Viking burial as represented by Frazer, and accepted by later commentators, the site can be reinterpreted as a native Irish cemetery of the Early Christian period, into which a Viking burial has been inserted.

Frazer's paper describes the site as a 'circular ... flattened elevation ... approx. 100' diameter' (c. 30 m). The sketched section scale showed an overall depth of three feet from the ground surface to the yellow sub-soil (or boulder clay) at the base of the 'mound'. Therefore the site actually consisted not of a 'great' mound, but of a low circular platform. This same section sketch indicates that there were eight inches of 'soil', twelve inches of 'covering' and

sixteen inches of 'clay with bones'. It is remarked that there were no burials in the 'stiff' yellow clay except where 'through the lapse of time, the bones of a few of the lower stratum of skeletons resting on the surface had sunk down slightly into it'.³ As it is not a usual occurrence for objects (especially as lightweight as bone) to sink into sub-soil or boulder clay, what Frazer observed were the bases of graves which had penetrated the sub-soil. An important observation, which affects the interpretation of this site, is made later: 'towards the eastern side of the mound . . . the lowermost layer of human bodies had been there arranged with tolerable uniformity . . . at least two such rows placed one behind the other with their heads pointing westward and their feet to the east, the skeletons lay in close apposition side by side'.⁴ This is a description of normal burial practice in Ireland from about the fourth century A.D.,⁵ an indication that this is a cemetery of the Early Christian period. The statement that 'not a single remnant of personal property or ornament was left on their persons, save two little brass rings, and the worthless iron band that probably bound a slave girl's arm' further supports this conclusion.⁶ Frazer noted, in support of his theory for the alleged massacre, that above the original regularly aligned burials was 'a second layer of dead, thrown down in every possible direction' and 'a firm cohering mass (of clay) which yielded two thigh bones placed horizontally in their natural position, a third thigh bone was embedded between them and reversed, and two leg bones also in a reversed position'. This is a familiar phenomenon observable in archaeologically excavated cemeteries in Ireland when successive layers of burial have been superimposed upon each other, the long bones of earlier burials having been 'tidied' to make room for the next interment. Given the comparatively shallow layer of soil, and the presence of over 600 burials reportedly recovered from this site, an enormous amount of disturbance would have taken place during the interment of successive burials. This would also account for the 'separated skulls and small groups of four and eight skulls' which are described as being the result of decapitations, but are more likely to have been the result of disturbance, with the 'small groups' resulting from tidying-up operations and re-burial from time to time by grave diggers. While it is possible that some individuals buried in the cemetery may have suffered violent deaths, the majority of the 'injuries' apparent on skulls, which are described as looking as though they had been kicked around, hacked, etc., could also have been caused during disturbance by successive interments. Further 'evidence' for the purported mass slaughter at the site is given in the following statement: 'we procured several squares of sandstone or small flagstones and split calp . . . averaging each about a foot square . . . these were thrown in amongst the slain bodies and some at least used as offensive weapons . . . one pressing upon a skull belonging to the lowest layer of skeletons . . . from the relative positions of this flagstone and the head, it was impossible to mistake the appearances for an accidental occurrence . . .'.⁷ This is a description, not of the results of extreme violence, but of the practice, often used in the absence of a fully slab-lined grave, of placing small slabs around the head of the deceased in order to protect it. The remainder of the slabs recovered were in all probability grave-lining slabs. An interesting possibility is raised by the statement that 'near some of the flagstones and in contact with them, we got fragments of wood charcoal in tolerable abundance'.⁸ Could it be that what Frazer saw was not charcoal but the decayed remains of wooden coffins, which often resemble charred wood?

The position and orientation of the secondary burials is not clear. However, Frazer states that 'we also found where the hands of the dead had lain across their abdomen, that as decomposition advanced the bones of the hands fell down into the pelvic cavity'.⁹ This can be taken as an indication that these burials were supine, extended inhumations, similar to those observed at the lower primary level, and from this it may be assumed that they were oriented W.-E. in similar fashion.

The upper stratum of burials is described as being of 'young bones',¹⁰ but this is nothing more sinister than an indicator that the cemetery in its final phase became a killean or burial place for unbaptized children, a practice familiar throughout Ireland.

Referring to midden material comprising sea shells and animal bones, recovered in the S. and W. area of the cemetery, Frazer concludes that this constitutes the remains of a feast eaten by the perpetrators of the 'massacre'.¹¹ The material is described as lying above the

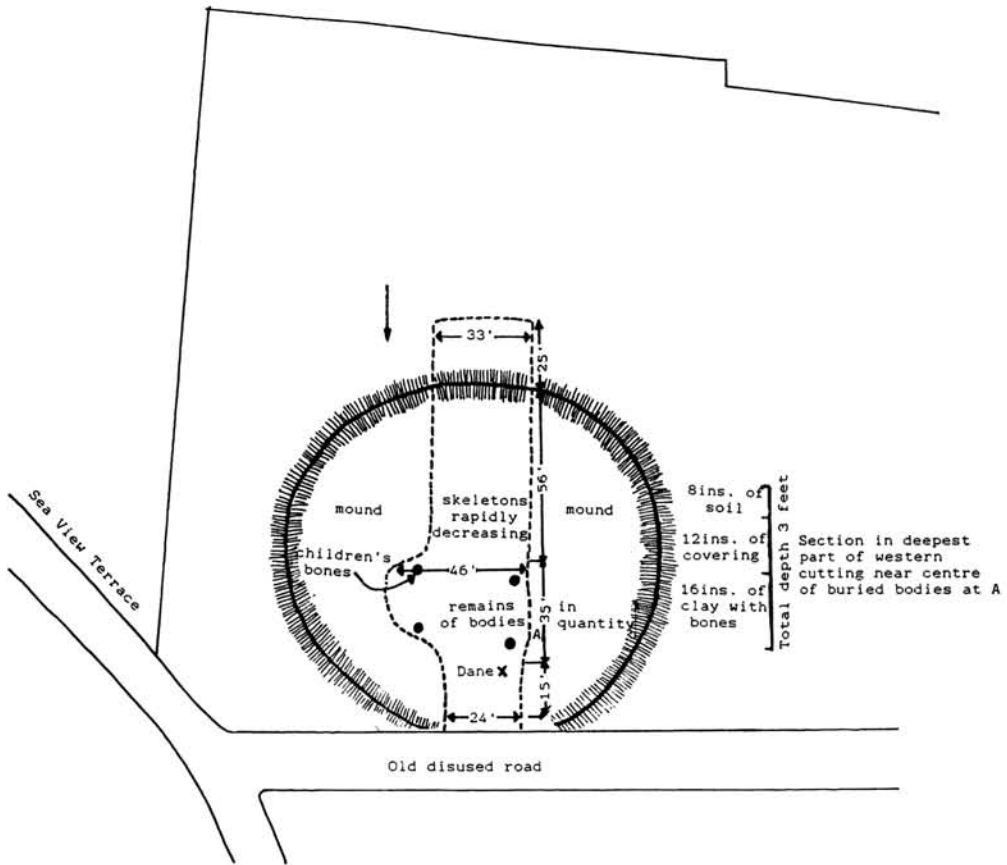


FIG. 5

Plan of Mount Erroll, Donnybrook, Co. Dublin (after Frazer). North is at the bottom of the plan

bones (in this case apparently the groups of skulls) and immediately beneath the surface turf, and is said to have also contained a fragment of early earthenware and a spindle whorl of baked clay. The earthenware fragment is not described and is not now available for examination, but the spindle whorl, which is made from bone and not baked clay, is in the National Museum of Ireland (SA 1900:29).¹² It is of Irish type, with connected dot and circle decoration, and is similar to spindle whorls from Lagore crannog, period 1, 7th/8th century.¹³ A fragmented bone comb found at the site, included by Frazer in a subsidiary article,¹⁴ is classified as Irish, class E, by Dunlevy, and datable to pre-9th to 10th century.¹⁵ The animal bones in the midden material include horse, cow, calf, sheep, pig, dog and possibly wolf. It is likely that what is represented here is exactly what Frazer originally thought it appeared to be, i.e. 'the emptyings of some old domestic refuse-heap or kitchen-midden'. The midden is an indication of the presence of habitation nearby, and the fact that the midden material covered the burials seems to indicate that this possibly secular cemetery had ceased to function as such during the period of that habitation, possibly as early as the 9th century based on the evidence of the spindle whorl and comb. The abandonment of such a cemetery could be the result of the more widespread use by the laity of ecclesiastical cemeteries at about that time.¹⁶

The Viking burial, which was described by the workmen who uncovered it as being accompanied by two female 'sacrificial' burials, was located at the N. edge of the cemetery and was observed to be lying N.-S., with head to the N.¹⁷ This burial was seen to have been undisturbed by any later burials, an indication that it had been inserted into a cemetery which had already been abandoned in the 9th century for adult burial by the local population.

The cemetery at Donnybrook, Dublin, can now be recognized as a secular or familial cemetery of the Early Christian period into which a single Viking burial was deposited, possibly accompanied by two female sacrificial burials. This practice of the deposition of pagan Viking burials in Christian cemeteries is well attested elsewhere in Ireland, the Isle of Man and Britain.¹⁸

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NOTES

¹ W. Frazer, 'Description of a Great Sepulchral Mound at Aylesbury Road, Near Donnybrook, in the County of Dublin, Containing Human and Animal Remains, as Well as Some Objects of Antiquarian Interest, Referable to the Tenth or Eleventh Centuries', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.* 16 (vol. 11, 1879-88), 29-55.

² R. A. Hall, 'A Viking-Age Grave at Donnybrook, Co. Dublin', *Medieval Archaeol.* 22 (1978), 64-83; H. B. Clarke, 'Gaelic, Viking and Hiberno-Norse Dublin', in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *Dublin through the Ages* (Dublin, 1988), 5-24, esp. 13-14.

³ Frazer, *op. cit.* in note 1, 31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵ E. O'Brien, 'Late Prehistoric — Early Historic Ireland. The Burial Evidence Reviewed', unpubl. M.Phil. thesis, University College Dublin, 1984; *Id.*, 'Christian Burial in Ireland: Continuity and Change', 130-37 in N. Edwards and A. Lane (eds.) *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, Oxbow Monograph 16 (Oxford, 1992).

⁶ Frazer, *op. cit.* in note 1, 52.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹² *Ibid.*, 51, fig. 7. Thanks to Ms Nessa O'Connor, National Museum of Ireland, for facilitating examination of this item.

¹³ R. O'Floinn, National Museum of Ireland, pers. comm.

¹⁴ W. Frazer, 'The Aylesbury Road Sepulchral Mound', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.* 16C (1879-88), 116-18.

¹⁵ M. Dunlevy, 'A Classification of Early Irish Combs', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.* 88C (1988), 341-422, esp. 362, 393.

¹⁶ O'Brien (1991), *op. cit.* in note 5.

¹⁷ For a full description of this burial see Frazer, *op. cit.* in notes 1 and 14, and see Hall, *op. cit.* in note 2.

¹⁸ E. O'Brien, 'Location and Context of Viking Burials at Kilmainham and Islandbridge, Dublin', in preparation, contains details of parallels.

A NORTHAMPTON JEWISH TOMBSTONE, c. 1259 TO 1290, RECENTLY REDISCOVERED IN NORTHAMPTON CENTRAL MUSEUM (Fig. 6; Pl. IX, B)

The study of England's medieval Jews is beset by a major problem: the paucity of physical evidence for their existence and significance. The medieval Anglo-Jewry must be studied by largely documentary means. The rediscovery of a 13th-century tombstone is significant as it may be the only example of its kind in England; it also preserves perhaps one of only two surviving Hebrew inscriptions of the period in the country.¹ The tombstone was rediscovered by Mr Robert Moore of Northampton Central Museum in 1987 after it had lain forgotten in the cellars of the museum since the 1860s. He was able to re-identify it by reference to a sketch made of it by Northampton antiquarian Dryden in 1886.²

The tombstone is said to have been found in the early 1840s during the construction of Princes Street, Northampton. It shows evidence of having been incorporated in a wall.