

ART. VII.—*An Anglo-Saxon pin from Birdoswald.* By  
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*Read at Penrith, September 6th, 1963.*

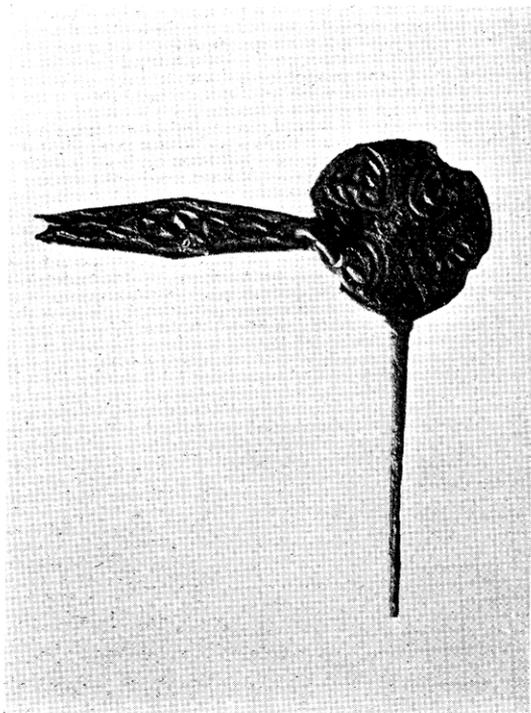
ANGLO-SAXON metalwork finds from Bernicia are of such rare occurrence that individual stray pieces such as this hitherto unpublished pin from Birdoswald (Plate I) are of some importance for determining the extent and nature of the Anglian penetration of the area. It was found, in 1956, during routine clearance of the south face of Hadrian's Wall between Birdoswald fort and M/c 49 (Harrow's Scar); I am indebted to Mr Charles Anderson from the Corbridge Museum for details of its discovery and for placing it at my disposal for examination.

It is a disc-headed pin of bronze, with well-preserved gilding on the front of the head-plate and tinning on the back and on the pin shaft. I am grateful to my colleagues Dr C. W. Gibby, F.S.A., and Mr R. Phillips for kindly undertaking an examination of it; Mr Phillips reports that the X-ray spectograph shows only copper, tin and small traces of zinc and iron; silver is definitely not present and the plating material would therefore appear to be tin. Its dimensions are: maximum length 7.4 cm., maximum length of head-plate 3.1 cm., maximum width of head-plate 2.4 cm. The edge of the head-plate is slightly worn but not to such an extent that it affects the measurements appreciably. The head-plate and pin have been cast separately and neatly slotted together, held firm by an iron rivet. The piercing on the right of the head-plate shows that this pin was the left-hand member of a three-pin suite such as has been found complete in the famous set from the river Witham,<sup>1</sup> and partially complete in the hitherto unpublished pin and link from Kegworth,

<sup>1</sup> Reginald A. Smith, *British Museum Guide to Anglo-Saxon Antiquities* (1923) 98 and plate facing 100.



PLATE I.—Gilt-bronze pin from Birdoswald, Cumberland.  
The left-hand pin of a three-pin suite.



*By kind permission of the Leicester Museum*

PLATE II.—Bronze pin and connecting-link from Kegworth,  
Leicestershire.

The right-hand pin of a three-pin suite.



*By kind permission of the Hull Museum*

PLATE III.

Bronze pin-head from Roos,  
East Riding of Yorkshire.

Leicestershire (Plate II). Such pin suites are not known from pagan graves in which, however, "union" or paired pins with a chain link have been found; and in two elaborate gold and garnet examples, from Little Hampton, Worcestershire, and Roundway Down, Wiltshire,<sup>2</sup> the pins are linked by flat plates as well as a chain, and have a central medallion, so that they are nearer in type to the later disc-headed suites.

The later disc-headed pins, like that from Birdoswald, are all stray finds and their chronology is still somewhat debatable, but certain categories of construction and ornament do emerge from a study of known examples, to throw some light on the Birdoswald specimen. The following examples are known to me:

1. Hauxton Mill, Cambridge.
2. Lakenheath, Cambridge.
- 3a and b. Cambridge: Cyril Fox, *Archaeology of the Cambridge Region* (1923) 297 f. and plate xxxiv 6.
4. The Witham suite, Lincolnshire (already cited).
- 5 and 6. Ixworth, Suffolk: a fragment in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and a pin with animal ornament (Reginald A. Smith, "Examples of Anglian art", *Archaeologia* lxxiv, 1925, fig. 16).
7. Roos, Yorkshire E. Riding, and
8. South Ferriby, Lincolnshire: M. Kitson Clark, *Proc. Leeds Phil. & Lit. Soc.* v, 1942, plate facing 333.
9. Kegworth, Leicestershire.
10. Meols Beach, Cheshire: (a) silver fragment (M. Kitson Clark, *ibid.*, 335) and (b) a bronze pin (Bu'lock, *Trans. Hist. Soc. of Lancs. & Cheshire* 112, 1960, fig. 3d).
11. Støle, Norway: J. Petersen, *Viking Antiquities of Great Britain and Ireland* v, 1940, fig. 47.
12. Lunde, Norway: *ibid.*, fig. 148.
13. Hitchin, Hertfordshire: John Evans, *Archaeologia* liii, 1892, 257.
14. Chichester, Sussex (now lost).

All these pins are of gilt-bronze except those from Roos and South Ferriby, which are of bronze, and that from Meols Beach, which is of silver.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 43 f.

<sup>3</sup> There is no obvious trace of gilding on the Kegworth pin, but the Leicester Museum authorities, who have kindly allowed me to publish it here, describe it as gilt.

It seems probable that the elaborate gilt-bronze specimens (such as those from Cambridge, Hauxton Mill, Ixworth, Lunde or Støle), which preserve only the head or part of the head-plate, were cast in two pieces like the Birdoswald specimen; this is an elaborate and possibly an earlier method. By contrast, the pins from South Ferriby, Roos, Meols Beach and Kegworth, preserve the stump of the pin-shaft and were cast in one piece, in the manner shown in the 9th century moulds from the Mote of Mark.<sup>4</sup>

There is also a notable difference in size in these disc-headed pins: 2-3 cm. at Birdoswald, Roos, Kegworth, Lakenheath, South Ferriby and Meols, as against 4.5-5.5 cm. at Cambridge, Ixworth, Lunde, Støle and Hauxton Mill. It may be possible to date pins with elaborate animal ornament, such as those from the river Witham or Ixworth, fairly closely; but it is more difficult to fit into a chronology the pins with simple cruciform and interlace designs.

Mary Kitson Clark<sup>5</sup> would date as earliest the pins with an obvious cross motif such as that from Roos, which has a cross with expanded arms outlined by tiny punch-marks, or the South Ferriby pin on which the cross is of the lorgnette type.<sup>6</sup> The Kegworth pin, which also shows an expanded arm cross, would seem to belong to this group. In dating such pins as those from the Witham or Ixworth to the 9th century she follows Kendrick and Brøndsted — but some modern art historians would date these specimens to the 8th century. It is in fact quite possible that the more elaborately constructed and heavily gilded specimens are 8th century, and the cruciform ones with little or no gilding are 9th century.

In construction and quality of technique the Birdoswald pin is closely linked with the East Anglian group, but in

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. O. Curle, *PSAScot.* xlvi, 1913, 147

<sup>5</sup> *Proc. Leeds Phil. & Lit. Soc.* v, 1942, 337.

<sup>6</sup> On stone carving this lorgnette type of cross is a Northumbrian feature, perhaps associated with Ripon.

its simple ornament it is best compared with the only other Northumbrian example, that from Roos. The triquetra motif is not distinctive enough to bear any chronological weight, although a close parallel to the Roos decoration is found on a bronze fragment from Whitby,<sup>7</sup> on which the field is divided by an expanded armed cross and the triquetrae have one rounded loop to fit into the arm of the cross. The Birdoswald motif, however, is more pointed and truly geometric. In 9th century Northumbria silver and gold were in short supply, as the bronze *stycas* indicate, and simple bronze ornaments such as the Roos pin were no doubt worn. In view of the gilding and the precise chip-carved technique, and perhaps also the absence of a cruciform device, it seems reasonable to place the Birdoswald pin in an 8th-century milieu.<sup>8</sup>

I am grateful to the curators of the Cambridge, Hull and Leicester Museums for their kind co-operation, and to Mr David Wilson, F.S.A., of the British Museum for his help in supplying some references.

<sup>7</sup> *Archaeologia* lxxxix, fig. x 16.

<sup>8</sup> The only other Anglo-Saxon find supposedly from Birdoswald, is a "small-long brooch" which is noted by J. C. Bruce, *The Roman Wall*, 2nd edition, 1853, 251 and plate facing. This is, however, almost certainly a south-country find and will be discussed with other material in a forthcoming number of *Arch. Ael.*