

V.—SIX SILVER RING-BROOCHES OF THE  
FOURTEENTH CENTURY FROM NORTH-  
UMBERLAND.

BY PARKER BREWIS, M.A., F.S.A., A VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE  
SOCIETY.

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During the excavations at Newminster Abbey in 1925, Sir George Renwick, Bt., discovered under the floor of the *cellarium* a hoard of silver coins which must have been buried early in the fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup> He also found at the same place two silver ring-brooches which have not hitherto been described.

The larger of these brooches (Plate XIII, Fig. 1) is two and a quarter inches in diameter (over the ring), and is complete with pin. It has four rosettes equally spaced on its circumference, one of the rosettes being upon the pin head. Alternating with these rosettes are four collars or knobs, which have been decorated with a small ring punch. This tool was evidently a favourite with the silversmiths of Britain in the fourteenth century, for it was used to decorate many of the brooches of that period. Both the rosettes and the collars have been gilded, but the latter are so much worn that most of the punch decorations as well as the gilding have been obliterated. The pin is circular in section, and has a collar near its hinge. This collar is a feature of the period. In the illustrations, Figs. 1 and 2 (Plate XIII), it is hidden by the rosette on the pin head, but is shown in Fig. 3 (Plate XIV), and yet more clearly in Figs. 4 (Plate XIV), 5 and 6 (Plate XV).

<sup>1</sup> *Pro. Soc. Antiq. N/c.*, 4th Ser., Vol. II, p. 47.

The second brooch from Newminster (Plate XIII, Fig. 2) is similar to the first in all respects, save that the ring is only one and three-quarters inches in diameter and a portion of the rosette on the pin head is missing. This brooch shows less signs of wear than the first.

These objects have been somewhat drastically cleaned, and now look new, but they are of the fourteenth century, and were probably buried with the aforementioned coins. Six brooches of this type have previously been found in association with coins of the fourteenth century, and are tabulated in an important paper by Mr. Graham Callander, F.S.A. Scot., Director of the National Museum, Edinburgh.<sup>2</sup>

This type of brooch may be sub-divided into two divisions, (a) those having four rosettes and four collars, (b) those having six rosettes and six collars.

Of the latter sub-division, i.e., those having six rosettes and six collars, there is an exceedingly fine specimen in the Society's Museum (Plate XIV, Fig. 3). It bears no label stating where it was found, but by a process of elimination it becomes fairly certain that it was presented to the Society in the year 1815. The list of donations at the end of the first volume of the first series of *Archæologia Aeliana*, page 6, contains the following entry: "January 4, 1815, a large silver *fibula*, found in the Tyne near Benwell. Donor Mr. G. A. Dixon, Newcastle." The word "large" is indefinite; one wishes that further particulars had been given. This example is exceptionally large, the ring being two and seven-eighths inches in diameter; there is but one other known as large, viz., that now in the Wiltshire Museum, Devizes; it also is two and seven-eighths inches in diameter, has six rosettes, no collars and a flat pin.

The Newcastle example has six rosettes alternating with six collars. The rosettes are decorated with *niello* and have been partly gilded—one rosette slightly damaged is fixed to the pin head, whilst the opposite rosette is divided

<sup>2</sup> *Pro. Soc. Antiq. Scotland*, 1923-4, Vol. LVIII, pp. 160-184.

to receive the pin point. The collars are plain circular bands, the pin is circular and has a collar at the hinged end.

The fourth example (Plate XIV, Fig. 4) was found near Norham Castle, Northumberland, and is now in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. The diameter of the ring is two and a half inches, it has six rosettes alternating with six collars, the latter being decorated with small ring punch-marks. The rosettes and the collars have been gilded. The pin is circular in section, has a small quatrefoil in the middle of its front and a collar at the hinged end. The hinge of the pin works in the centre of one of the collars on the ring, the point rests in a groove in the opposite one.

Hitherto the Norham example has been the only one of this type of brooch published for Northumberland—the number now becomes four, thus exceeding that of any other county.<sup>3</sup>

Generally speaking the larger brooches have six rosettes and six collars, the smaller ones four, but this is not an invariable rule. There is one in the British Museum from Abingdon, Bucks., which is only one and a quarter inches in diameter yet has six rosettes and six collars.

The last two brooches (Plate XV, Figs. 5 and 6) to be described in this paper are of a different class from the others, being much simpler in their decoration, yet of a well-known fourteenth century type. Fig. 5 was found at Great Chesters (*Aesica*) and is now in the Society's Museum.<sup>4</sup> It consists of a stout silver ring one and fifteen-sixteenths inches in diameter. Four sections of the front of the ring are decorated with oblique grooves, the first, last and every alternate groove of each ornamental

<sup>3</sup> The tabulated list in *Pro. Soc. Antiq. Scotland*, Vol. LVIII, p. 176, gives five of these brooches for Dumfriesshire, but Mr. Callander has subsequently pointed out that this is an error, for Langhope is not in Dumfriesshire but in Selkirkshire—therefore there are but three for Dumfriesshire.

<sup>4</sup> See *Pro. Soc. Antiq. N/c.*, 2nd Ser., Vol. V, p. 26.

section have been filled with *niello*, for the most part now missing, whilst the intervening grooves have a ridge decorated with a small circular punch mark. It is complete with pin, circular in section, and has a looped hinge encircling a groove in the ring. Near the hinge, the pin has a prominently projecting round flat collar or flange; the circumference of this is milled and has a deep groove in the centre. This decoration on the pin collar is almost obliterated by wear, but shows clearly at the sides where protected from rubbing.

The brooch (Plate XV, Fig. 6) is similar to Fig. 5 with the exception of its size, it being only one and five-eighths inches in diameter. It was found at Hexham, Northumberland, and is now in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

The collar on the pin is probably derived from a collar used to strengthen the joint at the pin head, the pin being flattened, bent round the ring and returned on itself, with a collar added to hold the end. This collar, on the pin, is a prominent feature in ring-brooches of the fourteenth century, though at this period it was an ornamental survival, not actually of use. For example, in Fig. 5 the head of the pin is formed into a loop, with an open seam at the side opposite to the prominent collar.

Again, the collars and rosettes upon the ring may have had their origin in the strengthening of the joint of the ring, yet in the fourteenth century this joint was usually concealed under the hinge of the pin as in Fig. 5. The fact is that there was constant striving after display of ornament on such objects as brooches. The simple type of ring-brooch does not afford much space or scope for decoration and little more could be achieved than is shown in the examples, Figs. 5 and 6—hence in Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4 the ornament is applied, i.e., it is not ornamented construction but constructed ornament.

The quatrefoil on the pin of Fig. 4 (Plate XIV) is an outstanding example of misplaced ornament. It is possibly derived from the quatrefoil commonly on the pin head, as shown in Figs. 1, 2, 3, but in this particular

instance, Fig. 4, the pin is not, as usual, hinged at a rosette, but at a collar.

The annular brooch is a persistent type that remained in vogue from Roman times down to the late Middle Ages, indeed in Scotland it was used until the latter half of the eighteenth century.

In the penannular ring-brooch, provision had to be made for the pin hinge sliding round the ring, i.e., the hinge of the pin had to be opposite the gap during the donning of the brooch, so that the point could slide through the gap, whereas it must not be opposite when worn, or the pin would slip back again—hence the ring was plain and the decorative ornament applied to its expanded terminals. On the other hand, in the annular brooch the hinge of the pin usually has a fixed position, working in a groove in the ring—hence, in the latter form, decorative ornament could be applied anywhere on the circumference of the ring.

The penannular brooch is so convenient in its arrangement for fastening that it might be expected to have prevailed over the more clumsy ring. The expected evolution would be from a ring opening to allow of the passing through of the pin. But in Celtic times the process was a contrary one, for the penannular brooch closed, becoming an unbroken ring, allowing of no passage of the pin. Mr. Romilly Allen comments upon it as follows:<sup>5</sup> "In the final stage of the development of the penannular brooch . . . it ceased to be penannular, if we may use such an Irish expression."

Possibly the great popularity of the buckle may account for the return to popularity of the annular brooch, for the simple form of the buckle is almost the same thing as the annular brooch.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Celtic Art*, p. 229.

<sup>6</sup> *The Arts in Early England*, by Baldwin Brown, Vol. III, p. 286.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 1.

RING-BROOCHES FROM NEWMINSTER ABBEY (full size).



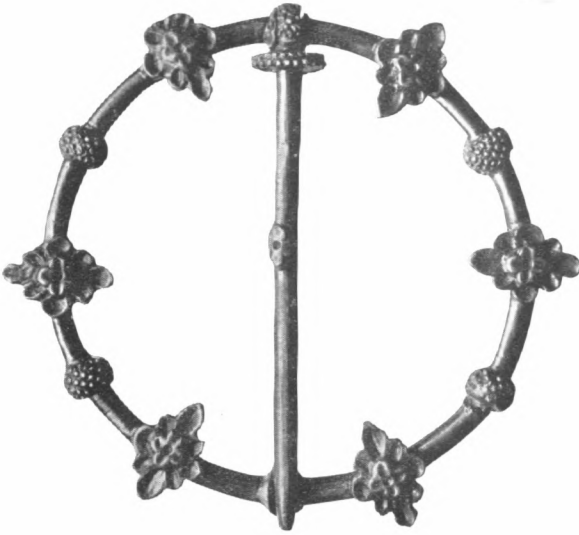


Fig. 4.



Fig. 3.

RING-BROOCHES (3) FROM BENWELL, (4) FROM NORHAM (full size).







Fig. 6.



Fig. 5.

RING-BROOCHES (5) FROM AESICA, (6) FROM HEXHAM (full size).

