

XVII  
MUSEUM NOTE, 2000  
A Gold Fede-ring Brooch from Whinfell Park, Cumbria<sup>1</sup>

*Lindsay Allason-Jones*

In the Museum of Antiquities of the University and Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne there is a gold fede-ring brooch which was presented to the Society by Dr Ranken Lyle in January, 1930 (fig. 1). Dr Lyle had bought the brooch, (Lot 1554) at the sale of the Chesters Estate in 1929 and when presented to the Society its provenance was described as 'near Lanercost'. When placed on display recently in the Museum of Antiquities this attribution was still attached to the brooch but research has shown that not only was this provenance incorrect but that two attempts had already been made in the past to provide the brooch with the correct findspot of Whinfell (or Whinfield) Park.

The first publication of the brooch appeared in 1794 in Hutchinson's *History of Cumberland*. Under the heading 'Whinfield Park', Hutchinson described the brooch as being found 'by a person following the plough on some lands lately taken up in tillage there'. Further details are given in a footnote: 'This was found in the year 1778 in Whinfield Park, turned up by the plough, is of pure gold, and weighs 19 dw. The clasping hands are neatly executed, and the letters of the note are raised, to admit a ground of enamel; it having been groved [*sic*] in, apparently for that purpose. It has been a fibula. There is a notch to receive the point of the tongue, and the ring has been cut through on the opposite side; in the ends, holes for receiving a centre pin appear,' (Hutchinson 1794, 295). Hutchinson also informed his readers that when the brooch was drawn it was in the possession of a Mrs Atkinson of Temple Sowerby.

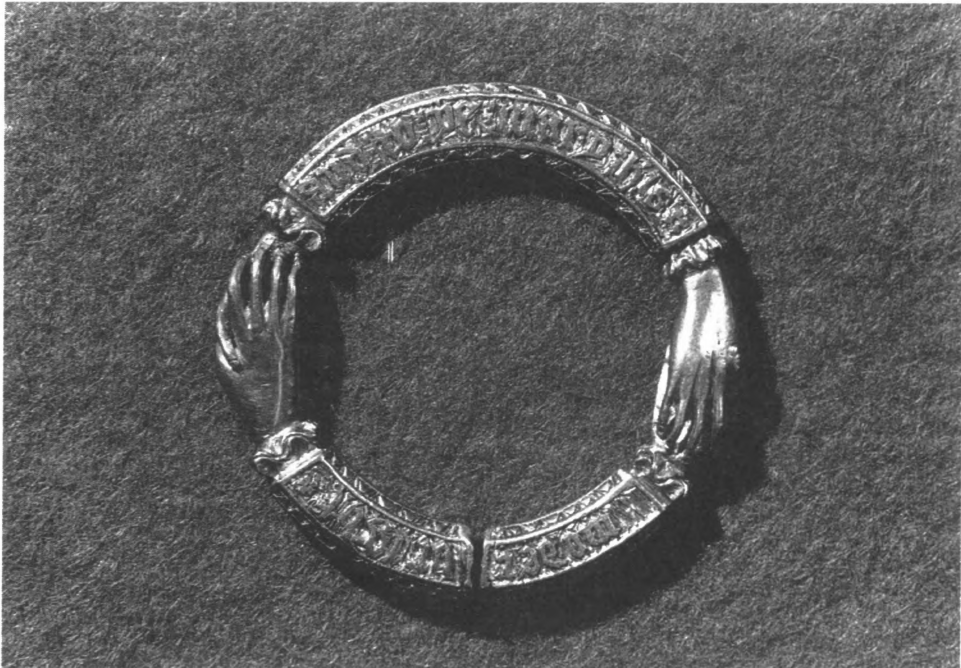
In 1930, Parker Brewis published a note on the brooch in *Archaeologia Aeliana*, describing

its findspot as 'near Lanercost'. In 1935, however, Thomas Wake published a note in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne*, drawing attention to the fact that the suggestion that the brooch had come from Lanercost had crept into its history between Hutchinson's note and the sale at Chesters House and that its true provenance was Whinfell Park. He had no doubt that the brooch described and illustrated by Hutchinson was the same brooch as that presented to the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne by Dr Lyle but offered no suggestion as to why the brooch had been attributed to Lanercost.

Whinfell Park lies approximately 5 miles to the south-east of Penrith, between Brougham Castle and Temple Sowerby. During the Middle Ages the land between the rivers Eamont and Eden was a deer park of the Clifford estate. However, it ceased to be a deer park in the late eighteenth century when the common was divided in 1775 and it may be that the 'tillage' referred to by Hutchinson was part of the agricultural development following the break-up of the old estate (Whellan 1860, 785). At this time, Mrs Atkinson would have been the nearest major landowner and, given her interest in antiquities, would have been an obvious person to acquire the brooch. Born Bridget Maughan, the only daughter and heiress of Michael Maughan of Wolsingham, she married George Atkinson, the Receiver General of Cumberland and Westmorland, on 7th June, 1758. She was a well-educated woman with the intellectual tastes of the eighteenth-century 'blue-stocking'. An enthusiastic collector of antiquities and natural history, she was also



*Fig. 1 The front of the Whinfell Park brooch: 'to ye ihe/u my trought I plight'.*



*Fig. 2 The reverse of the Whinfell Park brooch: 'and to ye Marry his moder bright'*

elected, at the age of 80, to be the first honorary member of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne at the Society's first monthly meeting held on February 6, 1813 – an honour made more distinguishing by the fact that the Society had, at that time, a purely male membership. On her death on 28 March, 1814, her collections, according to family tradition, were inherited by her eldest daughter, Dorothy, who had married Nathaniel Clayton of Chesters in 1786, thus explaining the presence of the brooch at the Chesters sale.<sup>2</sup>

The brooch itself (figs. 1 and 2) is a fine example of a late fourteenth-early fifteenth-century fede-ring brooch. The design is in the form of two pairs of arms with clasped hands. The hexagonal-sectioned sleeves have frilled cuffs. Above the cuffs the sleeves on both faces have letters in reserved metal; the floor of the surrounding trough has been roughened to take contrasting enamel although none remains to suggest the colour. The lettering on the front (fig. 1) reads:

To ye ihe/u my trought I plight

And on the reverse (fig. 2):

And to ye Marry his moder bright

This may be interpreted as:

To ye, Ihe[s]u, my troth I plight

And to ye, Mary, his mother bright

The hinge-ring of the missing pin occupied the break in the ring, marked '/' in the name 'ihe/u' in the text above. The point of the pin rested in the groove between the words 'I' and 'plight'.

Fede-rings are so called because of the two hands clasped in troth. As a form, these brooches can trace their origins back to the Roman period when the motif was more common on finger rings or on jet betrothal pendants. As brooches, fede-rings began to be popular in the twelfth century and continued to be so throughout the medieval period although complete examples are rare. A number can be seen on medieval sculpture, such as the statue of St. Mary Magdalene at Lanercost Priory (c.1250–1275), and it is possible that it was a reference to this parallel which led to the

original confusion in the attribution of the Whinfell Park brooch.

This would have been an important item of jewellery and, as such, is likely to have belonged to a woman of some substance, either a member of a local noble family or a wealthy religious. The Clifford family lived at Brougham Castle and as Whinfell Park was a Clifford deer park in close proximity to the family home it is not impossible that the brooch belonged to one of the Cliffords or one of their guests. Brougham was not a popular residence with all the Cliffords but Thomas, 8th Lord Clifford (d.1455), and his wife Joan, daughter of Thomas, 3rd Lord Dacre of Gilsland, certainly spent time in Westmorland, as did Henry, 10th Lord Clifford (d.1523). Henry's first wife, Anne St John (d.1508), cousin-germane of Henry VII, was an enthusiastic hunter in Craven and possibly in Whinfell. Other ladies who spent time in the area and could have owned the brooch or known of its existence were Eleanor Brandon (d.1547), niece of Henry VIII, and Anne Dacre, daughter of William, 3rd Lord Dacre, the first and second wives of Henry, 2nd Earl of Cumberland, or the women of the household of Philip, 3rd Lord Wharton, Keeper of Game in Whinfell in the time of George, 3rd Earl of Cumberland.

So far no reference to the brooch has been found in the Clifford Archive nor does it appear in family portraits, but it is possible that a brooch of this quality would have been considered worthy of record and that some contemporary reference will yet emerge. In the meantime, it is to be hoped that the attribution of the brooch to Whinfell Park sticks more firmly to the artefact than has been the case in the past.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Accession Number 1930.3. Thanks are due to Georgina Plowright, Dr R.T.Spence, Richard Hall, David Sherlock, and Tim Padley, for their assistance in preparing this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Bridget Atkinson's last will and testament does not refer to the collections at all. Indeed, Dorothy is cited merely as one of the residual legatees, the main beneficiary being Bridget's unmarried daughter,

Jane. There are a number of comments in the will which suggest that Nathaniel Clayton had already borrowed a substantial sum of money from his mother-in-law prior to her death – possibly not surprising in that he and Dorothy had six sons and five daughters and must have felt financially straitened on a number of occasions. The executors may have considered it more suitable, in the circumstances, for the Claytons to inherit only objects, as Bridget's will stated that the owed money was not to be included in her estate.

Jane Atkinson's will, proved on 16th February, 1856, left her niece, Sarah Anne Clayton, 'all of my shells and coins and the cases in which they are placed.' Her household effects were passed to Sarah Anne and Anne Clayton 'in equal shares'. It is, therefore, conceivable that the brooch may have entered Chesters House on the death of Jane rather than on the death of Bridget.

## REFERENCES

- BREWIS, P. (1930) "A gold fede-ring brooch", *AA*<sup>4</sup>, 7, 184–5.
- HUTCHINSON, W. (1794) *The History of the County of Cumberland*, I. Carlisle.
- LIGHTBROWN, R. W. (1992) *Medieval European Jewellery*. London.
- WAKE, T. (1935) "The Society's fifteenth century fede-ring brooch", *PSAN*<sup>4</sup>, 6 (1933–1934), 172–4.
- WHELLAN, W. (1860) *The History and Topography of Cumberland and Westmoreland, comprising their ancient and modern history, a general view of their physical character, trade, commerce, etc.* Pontefract.