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The Silverdale Viking Silver Hoard



This spectacular collection of Viking silver was discovered in mid September 2011. It is the third largest collection of Viking silver found to date (1) and was unearthed by a keen metal detectorist near to the village of Silverdale in North Lancashire. It had been buried for more than 1,000 years. Most of the pieces were contained in a lead 'pouch'. The survival of this container is, in itself, a rare occurrence that adds significance to the find.

In line with the requirements of the Treasure Act 1996, the finder immediately reported his discovery to the Finds Liaison Officer for Lancashire and Cumbria. The process of study and recording had begun. Overseen by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (2), specialists at the British Museum compiled a report for the local Coroner to consider and, in December 2011, the verdict was given that this collection of Viking silver complied with the legal definitions of 'Treasure'. Identified as find number 569 of that year - 2011 T569 - the Silverdale Hoard was now part of a legal process to ensure that the artefacts are held in a public museum collection and that the finder and landowner are each fairly recompensed.

The Silverdale Hoard comprises silver items including arm-rings, coins, ingots and chopped up pieces of silver known as 'hacksilver'. Alongside the lead pouch are a couple of fragments of lead and iron and one silver plated, base metal coin - a contemporary fake! The hoard is believed to have been deposited at approximately the same time as the Cuerdale Hoard, circa 905 AD.

It will never be known why this prized collection was left behind, but the original owner's loss is certainly our gain. The hoard reveals the truly international nature of Viking society - with coins minted as far away as current day Baghdad (Iraq) and the Frankish Kingdom (France), across the channel. It shows, very clearly, the evidence of skilled craftsmanship and - potentially - brings to us the name of an unknown king of Northumbria (Harthacnut) through one small, but very significant coin.

The hoard also helps us build a picture of Viking activity in the region, where there is little material evidence to guide us, and provides insight into the appropriation and re-use of objects and coins in the Viking period. Intriguingly it invites us to examine possible reasons for its burial and to consider potential links to other hoards in the region. Is it an accident, for example, that the style and content of the Silverdale Hoard is so similar to the massive Cuerdale Hoard found close to the River Ribble in 1840?

These and many more questions need detailed study and consideration. This and the careful conservation of the hoard form the second stage of our work on the Silverdale Hoard.

But, at present, we are delighted to be able to welcome the Silverdale Viking Silver Hoard into the collections of Lancashire County Council Museums Service and to present it to visitors in the state in which it was found. Our temporary exhibition 'The Silverdale Hoard: The Story So Far ...' starts at Lancaster City Museum (25 October - 21 December 2013) and travels to the Museum of Lancashire in Preston (15 February - 7 December 2014).

None of this would have been possible without generous support from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Art Fund, the Victoria and Albert Purchase Grant Fund, Lancashire County Council, Lancaster City Council and a number of local groups and individuals. The temporary exhibition was supported by the Art Fund and The Headley Trust (3). We are very grateful for all this assistance and for the permission of The Trustees of the British Museum to use many of their excellent photographs of the hoard in this work.

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Footnotes:-

1. The largest known Viking silver hoard, to date, is the Cuerdale Hoard. Found in 1840 close to the River Ribble it comprises over 8,600 pieces. It was also held in a lead container that no longer survives and many of the items in this and the Silverdale Hoard present strong similarities. Detailed comparisons will be of great interest in the research phase/stage 2 of the Silverdale Hoard project.

The second largest Viking silver hoard is the Vale of York Hoard. Found in 2007 it comprises 682 items including a gold arm ring and 617 coins. This hoard was held in a silver-gilt 'bowl'.

2. For more information about the Portable Antiquities Scheme and the Treasure Act 1996 visit <http://finds.org.uk>

3. For more information about the organisations that supported the acquisition and exhibition of the Silverdale Hoard visit:-

<http://www.nhmf.org.uk>

<http://www.artfund.org>

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/purchase-grant-fund/>

<http://www.sfct.org.uk/the-headley-trust/>



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