

## II.

NOTICE OF THE DISCOVERY OF A HOARD OF SILVER PENANNULAR  
ARMLETS AND COINS AT TARBAT, ROSS-SHIRE. BY HUGH MILLER,  
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On the 28th of March the grave-digger of the Parish Church of Tarbat, in Ross-shire, while engaged in digging a grave some few yards from the east gate of the churchyard, came down, at a depth of 5 or 6 feet, upon a line of hewn stones. They were apparently laid in a direction nearly east and west, parallel, that is, with the walls both of the church and the churchyard. He continued to dig down beside them on the side nearest the church, and there fell at his feet, apparently from some crevice in the masonry, several pieces of old silver, which he mistook for communion tokens, and two silver C-shaped rings, which he supposed to be connected with old communion plate. On examination, these articles have proved to be part of a small silver hoard of the Viking period. The supposed communion tokens are Frankish coins of Louis le Begue, 877-879, son and successor to Charles le Chauve; and the penannular rings are silver armlets, of types usually found with hoards of Anglo-Saxon coins.

On the 18th of April, a decent interval having elapsed after the interment, the minister of the parish caused an opening to be made in an adjacent space among the graves, in order to continue the investigation, so far as the crowded condition of the churchyard would permit. The supposed line of masonry was reached at about 5 feet from the surface. The stones were thin and somewhat flag-shaped, perhaps because they are in that form most readily quarried from the outcrops of the adjacent shore; they seemed to be laid without mortar, and in the direction indicated by the grave-digger; they are undoubtedly coincident in position, as was pointed out by him, with the old wall of the churchyard, which was shifted about thirty-five years ago. After digging down to a depth of nearly 7 feet, the excavator threw out a spadeful of earth and pieces of stone, together with three more silver coins, one of which has proved

to be a penny of Eadgar (959-975), sole monarch of the Saxon Heptarchy; but whether from unbroken ground, or from ground disturbed by the former excavation, is not known. Another coin was detected among the débris.

The entire "find" consisted of thirteen coins and two armlets, all of silver, as follows:—

- 1 penny of Eadgar (959-975) (see fig. 1).
- 10 pennies of Louis le Begue (877-879).
- 1 penny, illegible.
- 1 ,, broken in pieces.
- 2 penannular armlets.

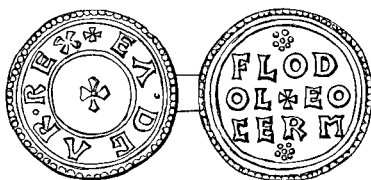


Fig. 1. Silver Penny of Eadgar, found at Tarbat.

The armlets are similar to the plain silver penannular armlets found with Anglo-Saxon coins at Skail, Orkney, and in several other places. One (fig. 2), which is quadrangular in section and has flattened ends, is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  by  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches; the other is circular in section, and of similar dimensions.

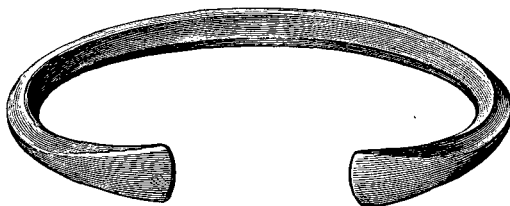


Fig. 2. Penannular Armlet of Silver, found at Tarbat.

The spot being closely environed by modern interments, further exploration was found to be difficult or impossible, and the hole was closed up. The "find" is believed to be exhausted.

It would appear that this little hoard, connected with an early civilisation of the district in which it was found, was placed for safety and concealment in a crevice among these stones, probably the foundation or lower part of a wall, and the owner, as in so many cases, returned no more to remove his treasure. No trace of any pot or vessel was detected, but the evidence seems not entirely to exclude the possibility that the hoard may have been laid in a rough receptacle of stone prepared for the purpose. If so, its coincidence in position with what is in our day the site of the superseded wall of the churchyard, is of course accidental.

In this excavation, and in other graves of the churchyard, the earthy mould in which the interments are made is found to extend to a depth of from 7 to 8 feet below the present uneven surface, resting upon white sand. The bottom of this considerable growth of mould probably represents a level not far from that of the original surface of the ground, the native soil of which in so bleak a spot was doubtless very thin. It thus appears that, though now overlaid by the accumulations of centuries, during which the soil has been fed by consignments of churchyard mould and the blown sand of the neighbouring *dunes*, which mingle into dark earth together, this ancient *cache* was probably made at a level nearly that of the original surface. It is interesting to note the fact that, far down in this dark earth there are preserved to us other, still more distinct, traces of occupation by living inhabitants. Over considerable spaces of the churchyard, not quite near the church, but some thirty paces from its east and west gables, the spade of the grave-digger passes through a layer of shells of edible species, chiefly the common mussel, sometimes lying in masses as much as a foot or eighteen inches thick, and always, if we are correctly informed by the grave-digger, near the bottom of the mould. These are undoubtedly kitchen-middens; and it was observed that similar fragments of edible shells were mingled with the mould cast out from the grave in which was found the first instalment of the silver relics. The date of this early occupation it is impossible exactly to fix. The kitchen-midden-heaps of the shores of the Dornoch Firth appear to be of very different ages, some of them being associated, so far as is yet known, only with stone and flint chips;<sup>1</sup> others with fish-

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. viii. p. 63.

hooks and needles of a material resembling bronze; others again, it is unnecessary to say, with fragments of modern crockery and whisky bottles. A part of the platform on which the church of Tarbat is situated, known as Ballefoid—or (probably) the *town of sods* (though it has not been a village within the memory of any now living), bears distinct traces of occupation in mediæval times or earlier. Thus about five hundred yards E.N.E. from the church there is a heap of heavy iron scoriæ made from bog iron ore, together with some remains of an old forge, round which the older people have assured the writer that they remember to have found “white pieces,” *i.e.*, silver coins; and in digging a hole beside the manse, which stands some distance nearer the church, the present minister found, at a depth of 4 feet, a layer of charcoal, the unmistakable remains, he thinks, of an ancient fireplace. However this may be, the shell-mounds in the depths of the Tarbat churchyard are at least fitted to remind us of the kitchen-middens of (?) the eleventh or twelfth century cleared out during the Duke of Argyll’s improvements at Iona.<sup>1</sup>

The church of Tarbat, though itself modern (1756), probably stands upon the site of a much more ancient ecclesiastical building. The graveyard has yielded fragments of no fewer than three Celtic crosses of the finest style of sculpture, some specimens of which were recently before the notice of the Society. The name of the adjacent village, which is Port-ma-homack—*Portus Columbi* in old charters<sup>2</sup>—seems to connect the spot with some Culdee saint, possibly, if one might judge from the Latin name alone, with Columba himself. The philological grounds of some such view were stated several years ago by the late Rev. William Taylor, author of the *History of Tain*,<sup>3</sup> and are quoted by one of us on a subsequent page of the Society’s *Proceedings*.

<sup>1</sup> Shell-mounds will probably be found associated with many of these more ancient chapels. The writer recently made a collection of edible shells—oysters, whelks, limpets, buckies, &c.—from the depths of the old churchyard of St Regulus, at Cromarty.

<sup>2</sup> *Originals Parochiales Scotiæ*, part iii. p. 434.

<sup>3</sup> See “Names of Places in Easter Ross,” *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 1886.