

III.

NOTES ON A HOARD OF SILVER ORNAMENTS AND COINS, DISCOVERED
IN THE ISLAND OF BURRAY, ORKNEY. BY JAMES W. CURSITER,
F.S.A. Scot.

On Wednesday, 24th of April 1889, Provost Peace showed me a telegram he had received from Burray, intimating the discovery in the peat-moss there "of a valuable find of silver rings and coins." I at once resolved to start for that island, but before doing so communicated my intention to Sheriff Armour, and requested him to accompany me, and he at once signified his willingness to do so. Arriving in Burray, we were met by Rev. George Johnston, U.P. minister, and Mr James Summers, teacher, and accompanied them to the schoolhouse. On the way there Mr Johnston produced two of the coins, which I recognised as one of Ethelred II. and one of Edgar. On our arrival being intimated to Mr George Petrie of Little Wart, the finder of the hoard, he immediately came to the schoolhouse, bringing the rest of the find with him, which he delivered up to the Sheriff on behalf of the Queen's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer. On being examined, the hoard was found to consist of the following articles, to which I have appended the weight *avoirdupois* as nearly as I could arrive at it:—

	oz. avoird.
1. Torc or neck ring, of three strands of twisted wire, the strands and torc being thinner towards the extremities than in the middle, the terminals being wanting on both ends,	2 $\frac{1}{4}$
2. Do., in fragments, of three double strands, very incomplete,	1 $\frac{3}{4}$
3. Twenty armlets, with quadrangular section in the middle, tapering towards the extremities, some of which are slightly flattened,	24 $\frac{1}{4}$
4. Five armlets, with cylindrical section in the middle, two of them being slightly grooved lengthwise,	6 $\frac{1}{2}$
5. Four portions of armlets of quadrangular section, and one portion of armlet of cylindrical section,	4 $\frac{1}{2}$
6. One hundred and four fragments of armlets,	27 $\frac{1}{2}$
7. One piece of armlet secondarily wrought, 3 coins, and 4 fragments of coins,	$\frac{1}{4}$
Total weight,	67 oz.

Mr Petrie furnished the following particulars:—He was cutting peats, he said, in the North Town Moss, on Monday, 22nd April, and when at a depth of about 3 feet from the surface, raised on his spade a small wooden bowl, which immediately fell to pieces, disclosing the silver. He did not at first know what the material was, and called on two or three others in the neighbourhood to come and see what he had found. He gathered together what he could, which are now delivered up. A few small fragments of the bowl he presented to me, for my collection of local antiquities. As the night was coming on and a fresh breeze blowing, we had to return to Kirkwall without visiting the spot where the find was made. On the Wednesday following, I got a letter from Mr Petrie, intimating that a search had been successful in finding a few more small fragments; and on Thursday I proceeded again to Burray, visited the place, took its bearings, prosecuted inquiries regarding it, and received from him the fragments referred to; these proved to be the hooks of both neck rings, with a few very small pieces of armlets and one piece of coin, all which I delivered up to Sheriff Armour on my return.

Burray, the island where the articles were found, is one of the South Isles of Orkney, separated from the mainland at Holm by about a mile and a half of sea, and has on its north east-point two brochs, one of which was explored by the late Mr Farrer *c.* 1858, and it is doubtless to the existence of these that the island got its Norse name Borgarey, now Burray. The island is divided into two districts, the Northtown and the Southtown, which are fairly well cultivated. The west portion of the island is chiefly a sterile waste of hill ground, from which peat has been cut till the soil is exhausted. Portions of this hill are known as the Northtown Moss and the Southtown Moss, on account of the people of these respective districts having the right of peat-cutting there. It was in the Northtown Moss, near the head of the green slade, that Petrie was digging that day in a clump of peat that had been left standing for years, as not worth the trouble of cutting, as the soil has to be removed to a depth of two and a half feet before burnable peat can be procured. His spade met with an obstruction, necessitating his moving it back for a few inches, and on raising it he found he had lifted the wooden bowl, which immediately fell to pieces. He says there were probably over a dozen coins, but they

were fragile, and mostly broke into fragments, and that he did not take especial care about them, but gathered the heavier metal into his handkerchief, and proceeded home. His wife and he returned afterwards, and instituted a careful search, recovering a few fragments of the bowl, and the hooks of the neck rings, with a few small fragments were found. I



Fig. 1. Torc of Silver, found in the Island of Burray, Orkney.

took *compass* bearings at the exact spot as follows:—The Howe of Hoxa in South Ronaldshay, W.S.W. $\frac{1}{2}$ W.; the top of Robert Bruce's house just visible above the ground, W. $\frac{1}{2}$ N.; and the Cairnhead of Hundu, W. by N.

The special features in the foregoing articles worthy of remark are—

In Lot 1, the torc or twisted necklet of silver (fig. 1) is similar in

design to those found at Skail, Sandwick, in 1858, but made of two strands. It measures in longest diameter $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches, and at shortest $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The two terminals, since found, measure together $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches; it was fixed by two hooks fitting into each other, and is without ornamentation. These measurements show that there was considerable spring in the ring, which would serve to keep the hooks in their places.

2. The wires have been twisted separately in double strands, and then three of these double strands twisted together; but there is no appearance of the small wires which characterised those of Skail.

3. The penannular rings or bangles, of which two are here figured (fig. 2), resemble generally those found at Kirk o' Banks, Caithness, and

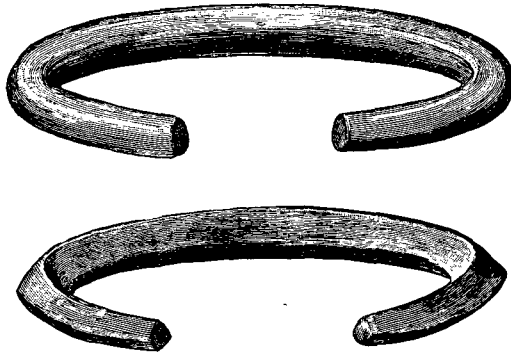


Fig. 2. Penannular Armlets found in Burray.

figured in the *Proceedings* of the Society, vol. x. page 585. One of the most perfect specimens, of which I exhibit a cast, weighs 2·164 oz. troy. Some of them seem never to have been worn, as the corners of the square section were so sharp as to lead one to infer they would irritate the skin if put on the wrist.

4. The smallest specimen is in this lot, and weighs ·45 oz. troy.

5. I believe constitutes the largest lot of broken silver ornaments hitherto discovered. The cutting has evidently been effected by an axe or sword, and not by a chisel. If they had been cut by a chisel, it would, if unsuccessful on the first attempt, be repeated in the same place; but

the hacks on many of these fragments show strokes wide of the mark in many instances, while in all, the fracture has been completed by bending and breaking; the intention of this breaking up has evidently been the preparation of the whole for the melting pot.

6. Contains one piece, which I imagine to have been a piece of arm-let, straightened and prepared for manufacture into something else.

The three entire coins I identify as—

(a) Penny of Eadward the elder, 901–925, king of the West Saxons, and is in very fair state. *Obv.* EADV . . RE+.+ with a small cross in the field. *Rev.* the moneyer's name in three lines, decorated with pellets and crosses, having three pellets triangularly placed above and below.

(b) Penny of Eadgar, sole monarch, 959–975. *Obv.* EAD . . RRE+.+ with small cross within inner circle. *Rev.* moneyer's name in two lines, with three crosses between the lines of the moneyer's name and three pellets above and below.

(c) Penny of Ethelred II., 978–1016. *Obv.* . . ELRED . REX . ANGLOIXX. King's bust to left, with a sceptre within an inner circle. *Rev.* a voided cross, with CRVX in the angles within an inner circle, +LOD . . OCYRD.

I have not been able to identify the fragments, although two of them are quite legible.

The fragments of the wooden vessel indicate a "caup," which looks as if it had been turned out of solid oak, with a round projecting base of about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches diameter. I should think that it would, when complete, measure about 8 inches in diameter and 4 inches in depth inside, the lip recurves outwards about $\frac{3}{8}$ ths of an inch from the top. Two fragments of twine were found with it, and the probability is that it was secured by being tied round with string to strengthen it.