

VI.

NOTICE OF A HIGHLAND BROOCH IN SILVER, ORNAMENTED WITH NIELLO, EXHIBITED BY MR T. S. OMOND ; AND OF OTHER HIGHLAND BROOCHES IN SILVER AND BRASS. BY JOSEPH ANDERSON, LL.D., ASSISTANT SECRETARY AND KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM.

The fine silver brooch, lent for Exhibition by Mr T. S. Omond, is one of the most elaborately ornamented Highland brooches I have seen. It belonged to the late Dr Thomas Traill, and all that is known of its history is contained on a scrap of paper which has been preserved along with it, bearing the following inscription :—“ Ancient Silver Brooch, said to have been found near Craig Phadrig, Inverness. A female offered it to a jeweller in Glasgow, who estimated it at its weight in silver, but a gentleman who was present gave her double the money and presented it to Dr Traill.” Craig Phadrig is the wooded hill a little to the west of Inverness, which is famous as being the site of one of the best-known vitrified forts ; but there is no suggestion of any association of the brooch with the fort, although the mention of this prominent feature of the landscape may be taken as indicating roughly the locality from which the brooch came.

It is of the usual form of the Highland brooch of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but is slightly larger than the common variety, being $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter over all, the central opening $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter, and the width of the circular band forming the body of the brooch $1\frac{1}{8}$ inches. The pin, which is of the usual shape, is $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches in length, and is ornamented on both sides by a running fret slightly punched with a chisel.

The obverse of the brooch (fig. 1) is decorated with a symmetrical arrangement of five circles of interlaced-work, alternating with five triangles arranged like the points of a star, and alternately filled with a triquetra interlacement and a trifoliate arrangement of an elongated leaf

with serrated edges. The spaces between the triangles of the circles are also filled alternately with foliage, trefoils, and triquetras. The designs

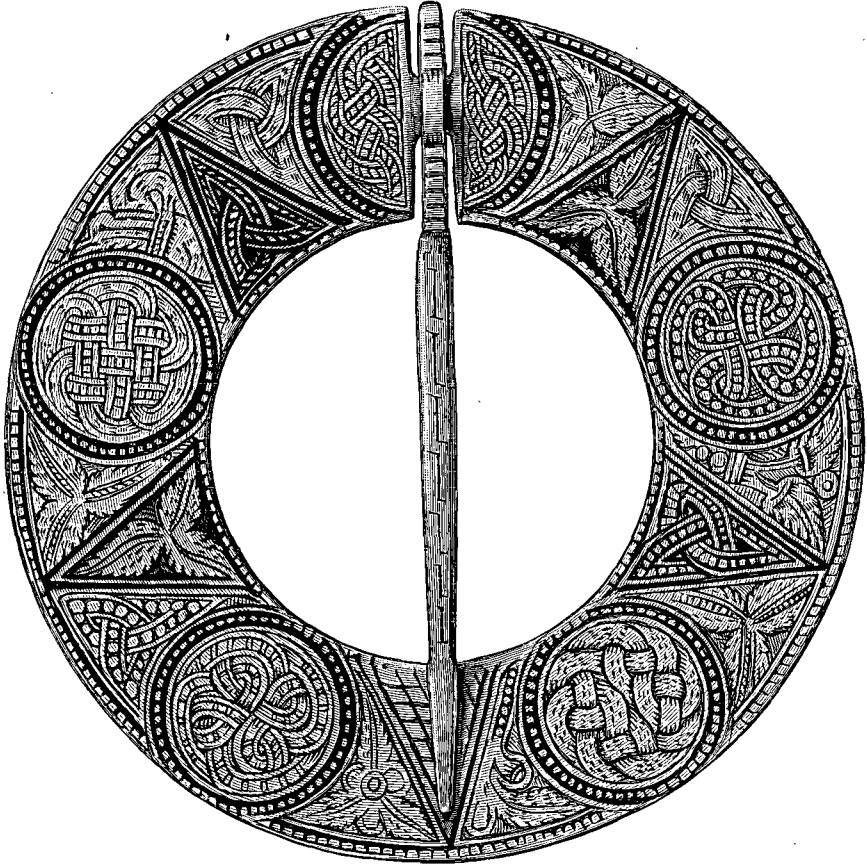


Fig. 1. Highland Brooch of Silver, ornamented in Niello. Obverse. (4.)

are shown up by the free use of niello in bands round the circles and outlines of the triangles. Two narrow bands of niello, with interspaces

of the white metal of less than $\frac{1}{16}$ inch between the narrower cross-bands of the niello, run round the outer and inner margins of the circular plate of silver forming the body of the brooch, and also round the circles of interlaced-work. In the case of the triangles, the double outline is formed of straight but narrow bands of niello, and the triquetras are outlined by four narrow and parallel bands of the same, with crossing lines between the two interior bands about $\frac{1}{16}$ inch apart. Where the triangles are filled with the trifoliations, the jagged outlines and the mid-ribs of the leaves are picked out in niello. The interlaced-work in the interior of the circles, and the triquetras and leafage on the background, are chased with crossing lines or shading lines and punctulations, to emphasise the interlacements.

The ornamentation on the reverse of the brooch (fig. 2) is carried out in an arrangement of alternating circles and squares set cornerwise between the marginal circles surrounding the body of the brooch. On this side the circles are small, scarcely exceeding $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter. Two are filled with flowers, one with a five-petalled, and the other with a four-petalled, flower; two are filled with curvilinear triangles, having small circles in the centre, with leaves filling the spaces between the sides of the triangles and the exterior circle; and one has an included five-rayed star in a kind of pentacle. These circles have a double outline chased in the metal, and separated by a slender band of niello, and the ornamentation within the circles is picked out with niello. The sides of the squares alternating with the circles measure about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch, and have double outlines like the circles, but with two bands of niello. Four of them are filled with ornament, and the fifth with lettering. Of the four that are ornamented, one has two interlaced ovals, each formed by four parallel lines, the inner two of which are filled with niello; and the space between them is crossed at intervals of about $\frac{1}{16}$ inch by slender lines of niello. Another square opposite this one is filled with some kind of rectangular pattern in thirty small squares. A third square is filled with a four-petalled flower, and a fourth with a wavy quatrefoil, all picked out in niello. The background between the

squares and the circles is filled with leafage festooned around the circles, except on the left side, where a triquetra is introduced between the circle



Fig. 2. Highland Brooch of Silver, ornamented in Niello. Reverse. (†.)

and the chequered square. The unornamented square at the top is traversed diagonally by the head of the pin, and has in the left division of the square the letters A C, and in the right the letters C C, in niello.

The lettering is not well done, and there may be a doubt whether the C's are not intended for G's. In either case the letters might stand for the initials of a husband and wife, and the brooch may be regarded as probably a marriage present, and made for the occasion.

Some years ago I met an old woman in Killin wearing a silver brooch,



Fig. 3. Highland Brooch of Silver, ornamented in Niello. Reverse. (f.)

ornamented on both sides (figs. 3 and 4) with engraved patterns, and enriched by broad bands of niello. She told me that it had been made in Glenlyon for the marriage of her grandmother, whose initials, with those of her husband and the date 1714, were engraved on the reverse of

the brooch.¹ It is an interesting example, because it shows the peculiar leafage and the beast motives which are characteristic of the brass brooches, along with the circular and anchor-shaped designs in niello



Fig. 4. Highland Brooch of Silver, ornamented in Niello. Obverse. (3.)

which are characteristic of the smaller and commoner variety of the silver Highland brooch of the eighteenth century.

The oldest of the silver brooches are those which have either actual inscriptions in black-letter, or simulated inscriptions—an imitation of the lettering in niello being used to fill panels of the ornament, as in the

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. xxviii. p. 183.

Benvere brooch.¹ Octagonal silver brooches, with legible black-letter inscriptions in niello in panels, alternating with floral and foliaceous ornament and figures of animals, also occur.² Inscriptions or simulated inscriptions in black-letter are more rarely found on the brooches of brass, and the probability is that, while some of the silver brooches may belong to a period earlier than the Reformation, few of the brass brooches appear to be earlier than the seventeenth century.

The brass brooches, as a rule, are larger than the silver ones, some of them being so large as to justify Martin's comparison of their size to that of a pewter plate. The largest in the Museum measures 7 inches in diameter, and they vary from about that size to about 3 inches diameter, the most common size ranging about $3\frac{1}{2}$ to $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. As a rule, they are decorated only with incised patterns, although there are two in the Museum which are partly decorated in niello.

The general scheme of the decoration of the brass brooches is mostly the same as that of the silver brooches, except that they do not present so frequently inscriptions or simulated inscriptions in black-letter. Four or more circles, nearly of the width of the body of the brooch, filled with interlaced patterns, are usually placed at equal distances, and the spaces between filled with foliage or nondescript animals. In some cases, though rarely, some of the circles are filled with foliage or with animals, as in the fine brooch presented by Dr R. de Brus Trotter,³ which shows a greater variety of ornament than usual, and is profusely decorated on both sides. Occasionally the scheme is varied by the interposition of triangular spaces between the circles, similar to those on one side of Mr Omond's silver brooch, and giving the appearance of a star, as in the case of the brass brooch exhibited by Mr Brook,⁴ which will be subsequently referred to.

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. xvi. p. 413.

² The Kengharair brooch, found in Mull (*Proceedings*, vol. xvii. p. 76), and the brooch from Bellahouston (*Proceedings*, vol. xxiii. p. 193), are examples of this variety. Another octagonal brooch, with a rock-crystal globe as a setting, was long used in the Ballochyle family as a charm for curing disease (*Proceedings*, vol. i. p. 170).

³ *Proceedings*, vol. xxi. p. 261.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. xxiii. p. 195.

A brass brooch (fig. 5), which has recently been acquired for the Museum, is a very characteristic example of this composite ornamentation. In four circles, placed at equal distances, are the usual knots of interlaced-work, one being angularly interlaced. In the spaces between are three nondescript beasts and two foliage patterns. The beasts are

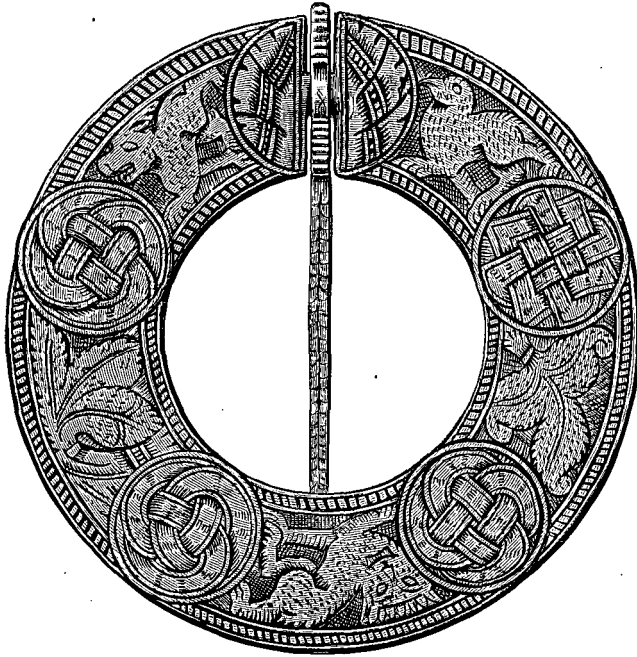


Fig. 5. Highland Brooch of Brass. (3.)

all different. One, with a somewhat leonine aspect in the front face, is crowned, and another has an aquiline head suggestive of the griffin.

Another brass brooch (fig. 6), also recently acquired for the Museum, has the circles of interlacements surrounded by a border of triangles, giving the effect of a many-rayed star. The foliage is large and coarsely executed, and there is but one beast, also very badly designed and

coarsely executed. The exterior margin of the brooch is pierced by small holes, which help to lighten the heaviness of the broad ring of metal.

That these brooches, whether of brass or of silver, were made by the



Fig. 6. Highland Brooch of Brass. ($\frac{2}{3}$).

people of the Highlands, and not by the regular tradesmen or professional silversmiths of the south, is testified by various writers, as well as by the general tradition of the country, and by the characteristics of the workmanship of the brooches themselves.

Mr A. J. S. Brook, in an article on two Highland brooches, exhibited by him in 1839,¹ one of which was of silver ornamented in niello, and the other of brass (fig. 7), with incised ornamentation arranged in triangular and circular spaces, expressed his opinion as follows:—"An



Fig. 7. Highland Brooch of Brass. (3.)

examination of these and similar brooches—apart from all historical references—leads me to the conclusion that they are the work of men to whom it was an accomplishment, or one of many accomplishments, rather than their trade." In support of this view, he points out that one of the main features of these brooches which suggests this inference is,

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. xxiii. p. 192.

that the constructive ability displayed is small, as compared with the taste in decoration.

The fact that the smaller and commoner variety of the silver brooches with the anchor-pattern in niello were made and carried about for sale by a *caird* (or travelling tinker, as he would now be called) of the name of Ross, was still^o remembered by the older people in the district of Central Perthshire not a great many years ago. In the beginning of the last century, Martin, speaking of the dress worn by the women of the Hebrides at the commencement of the 18th century,¹ states that it was fastened before upon the breast with a buckle of silver or brass, according to the quality of the person; and adds that he had seen some of the silver ones of a hundred marks value, and as broad as an ordinary pewter plate, the whole curiously engraven with various animals, etc. The Rev. John Lane Buchanan, who visited the Hebrides towards the close of the century (1782–1790), states that the common people are wonderfully ingenious,² and make their own implements, ornaments, etc., among which he instances “hooks for fishing, cast-metal buckles, brooches and rings for their favourite females.” Describing the dress of the women, he says:—“All of them wear a small plaid, a yard broad, called *guilechan*, about their shoulders, fastened by a large brooch. The brooches are generally round, and of silver, if the wearer be in tolerable circumstances; if poor, the brooches, being either circular or triangular,³ are of baser metal and modern date. The first kind has been worn time immemorial even by the ladies. The *arrisats* are quite laid aside in all this country by the different ranks of women, being the most ancient dress used by that class. It consisted of one large piece of flannel that reached down to the shoe and fastened with clasps below, and the large silver brooch at the breast.”

¹ Martin's *Description of the Western Islands* (1716), p. 208.

² Buchanan's *Travels in the Western Hebrides from 1782–1790*, pp. 83, 87.

³ This triangular brooch must be the heart-shaped form, styled in the Lowlands Luckenbooth Brooches, because they were sold in the Luckenbooths, Edinburgh.