

5. A GLASS LINEN SMOOTHER OF VIKING TYPE FROM
KIRKCUDBRIGHT.

In the Stewartry Museum, Kirkcudbright, is preserved a glass linen smoother which seems to be of Viking type, though not recorded in *Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland*.¹

The linen smoother, the smaller of the two shown on Pl. XLIV, is of dense glass, very dark blue (almost black) in colour; its surface is now extensively cracked and in places decayed and iridescent, whilst several C-shaped marks, sometimes indented, perhaps point to impurities in the metal. Its lower surface is smooth and rounded, its upper surface contorted by the pontil, with a distinct pontil mark in the centre. It is 4 ins. in diameter and $2\frac{3}{8}$ ins. in height.

According to the Stewartry Museum register the linen smoother was found in 1902 when a trench was being cut for laying a gas pipe between Townend and Millburn, in the burgh of Kirkcudbright.² Mr G. E. Paterson, Curator and Honorary Secretary of the Stewartry Museum Association, informs me that this would place the find not far from where the Museum itself now stands, which in turn is within two hundred yards of the site of St Cuthbert's Churchyard, where a Viking grave group of sword, ring-headed bronze pin and blue glass bead was discovered.³ No other relics are recorded as being associated with the linen smoother.

In *Viking Antiquities*, Part II, four glass linen smoothers are described, all without handles; two are from Islay, one from a well-furnished grave at Ballinaby and the second found at Dalvadie; the third was recovered from a burial-ground in Mainland, Orkney, whilst the fourth is from Perthshire.⁴ The type is Norse in origin, and in Norway itself predominantly 10th century in date.⁵ The linen smoother from Kirkcudbright closely resembles the specimens listed in *Viking Antiquities*, Part II, and its place of discovery might even be held to argue that it formed part of a burial group; it may therefore with some confidence be considered as a further piece of evidence for Norse settlement in Galloway in the 10th century.⁶

The linen smoother of very dark green glass, with a handle, also shown on Pl. XLIV, has already been recorded in these *Proceedings*.⁷ It was described in that account, dated 1881, as "found about forty years ago in digging a drain at Gribdae," a farm in Kirkcudbright parish (Nat. Grid ref. 25/730504), and is still in the Stewartry Museum.⁸ The account goes on to state that during subsequent draining operations at Gribdae an old drain was found beneath a cairn of stones,

¹ Ed. by Haakon Shetelig. Part II, *Viking Antiquities in Scotland*, by Sigurd Grieg.

² Reg. no. 3176.

³ *V.A.*, II, 13-14. Relics in Stewartry Museum, reg. no. 2050.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 38, 166, 80-1 and 156 respectively, with references; according to *P.S.A.S.*, xxvii, 70, the fourth specimen is "from Perth."

⁵ Jan Petersen, *Vikingetidens Redskaper*, p. 524.

⁶ I am indebted to Dr D. B. Harden for drawing my attention to five similar objects, all of variegated glass, in the Ashmolean Museum. These are presumably linen smoothers; though nothing is known of their origin, they appear to be recent and, if so, cannot but cast doubt upon the Viking origin of any linen smoother found unaccompanied by other objects of Viking age. In the case of the Kirkcudbright specimen, condition, appearance and place of discovery are in favour of a Viking origin.

⁷ xv, 192.

⁸ Reg. no. 2006. This is obviously the same as the linen smoother lent to the Scottish Exhibition of National History, Art and Industry held in Glasgow in 1911, where it was placed with Viking relics; cf. *Palace of History*, II, 806, no. 441.

and seems to imply connection between the cairn and the linen smoother. The Stewartry Museum register has a much more specific entry—an "Ancient Linen Smoother found in a cairn which had evidently been raised over a place of sepulture on the farm of Gribdae."

Taken by itself the register entry, though terse, is conclusive, and was obviously accepted as proof of the Viking origin of the linen smoother by the organisers of the Scottish Exhibition held in Glasgow in 1911. However, the account given in the *Proceedings* mentioned above shows that the register entry rests upon very insecure evidence, and may therefore be rejected. There is, in fact, little doubt that glass linen smoothers with handles are relatively modern; Dr Harden has kindly drawn my attention to their manufacture at Woodchester Glass House, near Stroud, Gloucestershire, in the 17th century;¹ no doubt there were other centres of manufacture.

I am indebted to Mr G. E. Paterson, Curator and Honorary Secretary of the Stewartry Museum Association, for permission to publish this note, and to Mr R. Roddam, of Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, for the photograph of the two linen smoothers. I am especially grateful to Dr D. B. Harden, Keeper of the Department of Antiquities in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, for his kind help and advice.

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Glass linen smoother from Kirkcudbright.