

Norrie's Law, Fife: on the nature and dating of the silver hoard

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ABSTRACT

Conflicting opinions concerning the deposition date of the silver treasure from Norrie's Law, Largo, Fife, are reviewed in the light of the 19th-century records of its discovery and contents, most of which were melted down when it was found in (or about) 1819. It is concluded that the hoard comprised predominantly Pictish silver, with some Late Roman elements, and was deposited most probably during the second half of the seventh century. A hitherto unrecognized fragment of Hiberno-Viking silver arm-ring is presumed to represent an otherwise unknown find from the Largo estate.

INTRODUCTION

The recent (1989–90) exhibition of Celtic metalwork, entitled 'The Work of Angels', contained a section on 'Early Pictish Metalwork, 6th–7th Centuries'.¹ In this no 8 comprised a hand-pin and two leaf-shaped, symbol-ornamented plaques from the silver hoard from Norrie's Law, Largo, Fife (Youngs 1989, 26–7), and no 7 consisted of the hand-pin, chain and spiral arm-band that survive from the Gaulcross silver hoard, Ley, Banffshire (*ibid*, 26). The Gaulcross catalogue entry by Michael Spearman and Leslie Webster concludes: 'It seems most probable that the Gaulcross hoard may date to the sixth or early seventh century, a precursor of the Norrie's Law hoard' (*ibid*). Under no 8 Spearman attributes the Norrie's Law hand-pin to the sixth or seventh centuries, while placing the plaques firmly in the seventh (*ibid*, 27), the date suggested by Susan Youngs for the pair of penannular brooches from the hoard (*ibid*, 26). At the same time Youngs draws attention to the 'very wide range of dates for the material assembled in the hoard' (*ibid*), extending back to the fourth century AD – or indeed earlier, should one follow Lloyd Laing's current dating to the second century of a plaque with raised scrolls (Laing 1990, 41), although others have attributed it to a date in the sixth or seventh centuries (see below).

'The Work of Angels' cataloguers do not suggest a deposition date for the Norrie's Law hoard, but it is clearly their opinion that it can have been buried no earlier than the seventh century. The latest date so far proposed for its deposition is consequent upon Robert Stevenson's dating of the fresh symbol-ornamented plaques as no earlier than c 700 (1955, 110; 1976, 248), indicating that the hoard could not have been concealed before the closing years of the seventh century – most probably at the beginning of the eighth. In this Stevenson has been followed by Wilson (1973) and by Graham-Campbell (1985), although others have argued for

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an earlier date – ‘perhaps around AD 600’ (Fowler 1963, 128) or even in the sixth century (Thomas 1961, 42–5).

When the symbol-ornamented plaques and those with raised scrolls were exhibited in 1970, in Edinburgh and London, Stuart Piggott attributed them to c 600, while acknowledging that some ‘would prefer a date considerably later in the 7th c.’ (1970, 33, no 173), including Isabel Henderson (1979, 22–3). A sixth-century deposition was accepted at first by Lloyd Laing (1975, 56; 1979, 160), although this was subsequently rejected by him in favour of a fifth-century date (Laing & Laing 1984a, 264; Laing 1987, 22).

In 1989 the symbol-ornamented plaques and hand-pin were exhibited in Durham, when Rosemary Cramp commented in the catalogue (nos 14 & 15) that ‘these ornaments appear to have been part of the burial deposit of a Pictish warlord, dating from the 6th–7th centuries A.D.’ (1989, 12). This suggestion that the Norrie’s Law find is no ordinary treasure is a revival of the 19th-century popular notion of a ‘warrior buried in his silver armour’ that was countered in detail by Joseph Anderson in his 1880 Rhind lectures, when he pointed out that it ‘rests upon no basis of evidence, or even probability’ (1881, 41).

Most recently, Lloyd Laing has rejected all such modern datings of the hoard’s deposition as too late, considering Norrie’s Law to be ‘one of a series of silver treasures dating from the late fourth or early fifth century, which have been found on the frontiers of the Roman Empire – the Traprain Treasure from East Lothian (Curle, 1923) is a similar kind of cache’ (1990, 41; see also Laing & Laing 1990, 134–5). This is a controversial proposition that, if it were to prove correct, would have major ramifications for the dating of Pictish art. It thus requires the most rigorous scrutiny and the purpose of this paper is to analyse the 19th-century sources for the discovery and lost contents of the Norrie’s Law hoard, together with a brief review of the surviving material (in the absence of even an inventory of the find), with the purpose of determining what can be established of its overall nature and dating.

DISCOVERY

A convenient description of the location is provided by Joseph Anderson: ‘On the estate of Largo, in Fife, and about three miles from the coast, and to the northward of the bay of the same name, there is an artificial mound known as Norrie’s Law. It is a tumulus, remarkable alike for size and situation. It crowns the summit of a natural elevation, which forms the highest point of a ridge commanding an extensive view.’ (1881, 34; RCAMS 1933, no 378.)

The tumulus comprised a cairn of stones, surrounded by a revetted ditch. On being opened up in the 19th century, three stone cists were revealed, one of which is reported to have contained a small urn and another some burnt bones (Stuart 1867, 77–8). This prehistoric cairn had been constructed on a natural hillock of sand and gravel, and it was while sand was being dug at its base that ‘there was made a most remarkable discovery of silver articles’.

One of the two earliest accounts states that these articles were found ‘about the year 1819’ in ‘a stone coffin’, although ‘no bones, ashes or human remains appear to have been found in or near the grave’ (Leighton 1840, 134). The other account from the same period (twenty years after the discovery) is less positive, stating simply that ‘they appear to have been found about the year 1819, in or near a stone coffin’ (Buist 1839). The ‘stone coffin’ was properly dismissed by Joseph Anderson as ‘clearly an inference’, even if ‘the articles may have been protected by a construction of flat stones resembling a cist’ (1881, 36–7).

The identity of the original finder (or finders) is unknown, but the silver articles were disposed of to a hawker or pedlar, identified only as Forbes in an unpublished letter from John

Stuart, written in 1864 (see app). The pedlar sold them for scrap, some to Mr R Robertson, a jeweller in Cupar, and a larger portion to another (unknown) in Edinburgh; it is also recorded that he 'bestowed' other articles locally (Buist 1839), although only 'a farmer in the parish of Ceres' receives specific mention as a recipient (Leighton 1840, 135).

In 1849 Robert Dundas of Arniston reported that the surviving portion of the hoard comprised 'those pieces which were left or neglected by the finder; they were picked up by the brother-in-law of the tenant and another person, both now deceased, who brought them to the [late] General [Durham]', who was proprietor of Largo (Way 1849, 257). However, 'two remarkable relics, a bodkin and one of the scale-like plates, were rescued from the crucible, in consequence of subsequent inquiry, and were added to the collection at Largo House' (*ibid*). The 'subsequent inquiry' was that by George Buist in 1839, who identified them as nos 4 & 5 in his drawing, reproduced here as *illus 1*; it is possible, therefore, that these two pieces represent the only surviving portion of the first parcel. The Dundas version of the discovery of the second parcel is doubtless to be preferred (as nearer source) to Robertson's statement that it was found only when 'General Durham, having heard of [the original find], employed some men to search the sand-pit at the base of the Law' (Stuart 1867, 78).

In contrast, there are no sound reasons for accepting a third parcel in the form of two brass coins – one first-century Roman, the other sixth- or seventh-century Byzantine – that a local labourer claimed to have found while digging for sand on the same spot 'in 1822, along with some silver coins' which he sold (Stuart 1867, 79). Nothing else is known of them before they were added to the Durham collection in 1860, being first mentioned in print by Daniel Wilson (1863, 260); only the Roman coin survived to be given to the museum with the silver relics.

John Stuart, in a letter to Mrs Durham written in September 1864, asked 'as for the two Coins recovered from Carstairs in 1860, is there reason to believe that his story of finding them in the same bank where the relics had previously been discovered to be relied upon?' (see app). Despite his doubts, Stuart published details of the two coins on the basis of a memorandum by the numismatist George Sim of Edinburgh (see app), who identified them as 'a Roman second brass of Antonia . . . who died A.D. 38' and 'a greatly defaced specimen of the Byzantine series, which it would be difficult to assign to any particular emperor, but which [he] considered . . . to belong to a period of about the seventh century, probably about the time of Tiberius Constantine, who died in A.D. 682' (Stuart 1867, 79). Stevenson's (1955, 111) correction of this date to 582, as 'a misprint', has been followed by most, but not all commentators (Laing & Laing 1984a, 263), although Professor Michael Crawford (*pers comm*) deduces from Sim's unpublished description that it was probably a coin of Constans II, of a type that was widely common in the mid-seventh century. The surviving Roman coin has since been more fully described as a contemporary imitation of a second brass of Antonia Augusta struck by the Emperor Claudius (RCAMS 1933, 187, no 382); Claudian copies were produced in southern Britain AD 45–64 in substantial quantities, but the Antonia variety was never very common.

Stuart's doubts were shared by Anderson in whose opinion 'the association here is not established by the evidence' (1881, 42, note 1). Macdonald, in his paper 'Roman coins found in Scotland', expressed himself of the opinion that 'it is doubtful whether the coins can have had any connexion with the main deposit' (1918, 238), whereas Bateson has recently reaffirmed that 'Byzantine coins in the British Isles need to be treated with great caution since only two coins out of ninety appear to be impeccably genuine imports' (1976, 178; Whitting 1961, 27).

It is thus unfortunate that the idea of association gained popularity during the 1950s and 1960s, but as Laing & Laing (1984a, 263) have emphasized, bronze coins have no place in such a silver hoard as that found at Norrie's Law and it is reasonable to suppose that the provenance was invented for commercial gain. On the other hand, two fourth-century Roman silver coins, identified by W F Skene (Wilson 1863, 260), appear to have formed part of the second parcel and will be discussed below, but were lost in the 19th century (Stuart 1867, 79).

THE 19TH-CENTURY SOURCES

Before proceeding to consider the contents of the two parcels of the Norrie's Law hoard in more detail, it is essential to review first the nature and limitations of the 19th-century sources given that they have already been utilized extensively.

Twenty years elapsed after the discovery of the Norrie's Law hoard, or 'Silver Armour' (as it was first known), before any account was published. The earliest was the *Report* by George Buist, 'then of Cupar and afterwards of Dundee and Bombay' (Millar 1895, 9), who had encountered the relics in General Durham's possession during his investigations into 'cross-stones'. The results of his enquiries, dated '*Cupar Museum, Nov. 1, 1839*', were presented to the Fifeshire Literary & Antiquarian Society, as a slim volume illustrated with the plate reproduced here (illus 1) on which the objects are reversed (cf illus 2), as well as two of Pictish symbol-stones (Buist 1839). The second account from the same period is that contained in J M Leighton's *History of the County of Fife* (1840, 134–5).

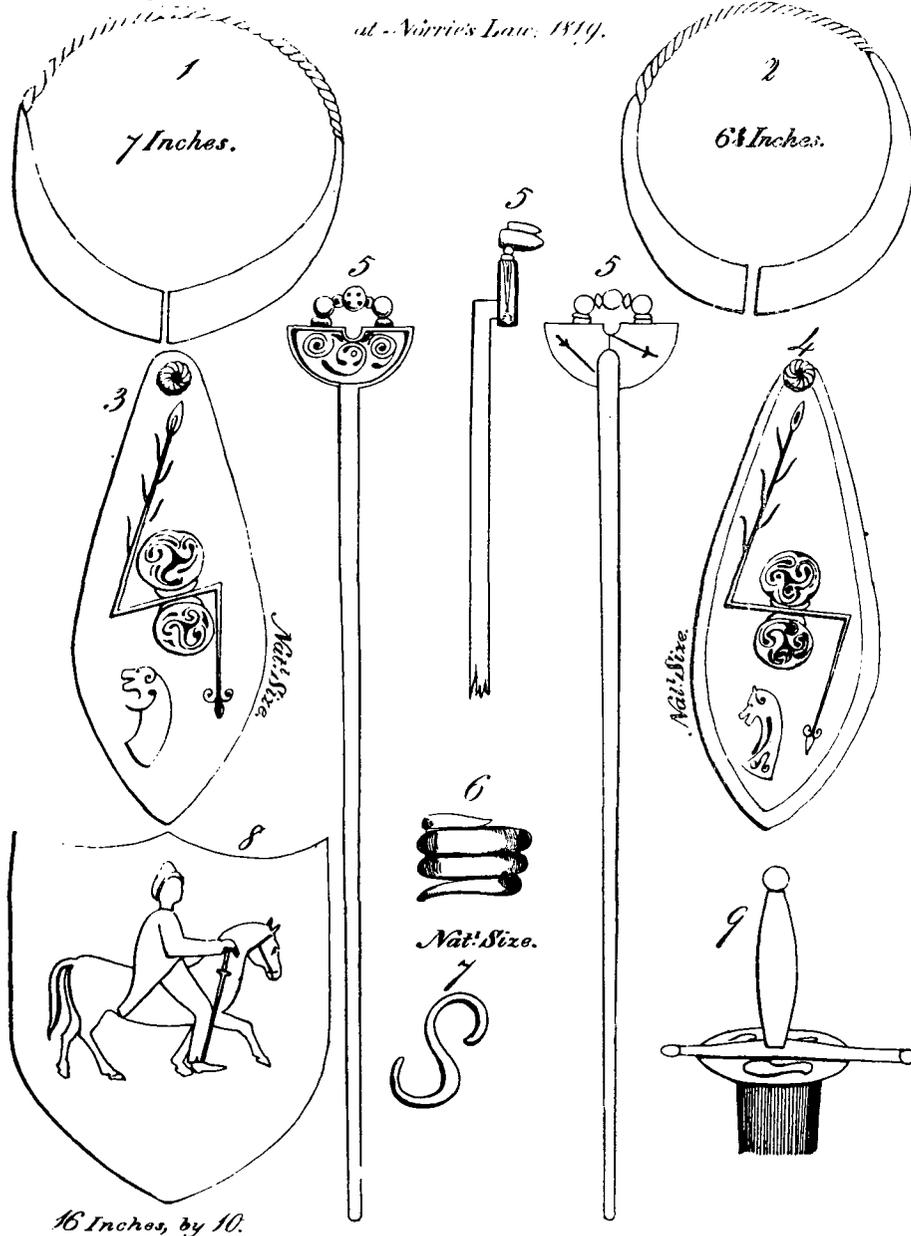
In 1867 John Stuart reported that Robertson, the Cupar jeweller, had recently stated that 'he, along with Mr. Leighton . . . had made a full investigation of the circumstances, and that the result was given in Mr. Leighton's work' (Stuart 1867, 77). Buist's report was inevitably based also on Robertson's evidence, as well as that of 'individuals to whom I have been by him referred', so that the two accounts differ but slightly.

In 1848 Patrick Chalmers published *The Ancient Sculptured Monuments of the County of Angus*, to which he appended a plate of silver ornaments identified as having been found at Norrie's Law in 1819. His account of the treasure is quoted correctly from Buist, with the authority for the date of discovery cited as Robertson, so it is reasonable to assume that his alternative of '1817', which occurs only in the postscript to his preface, is a misprint for '1819'.

Chalmers sent information on the hoard to Albert Way in London, for the collection of his drawings in the library of the Society of Antiquaries of London contains a copy in his own hand of Buist's plate (reproduced by Graham-Campbell in Higgitt & Spearman, eds, forthcoming (1993)), although the reversed objects are rearranged on the page which is inscribed 'Communicated by Patrick Chalmers Esq. of Brechin' (*Metalwork of the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age*, 42). As a result, on 2 March 1849, the silver itself was exhibited at the Archaeological Institute of Great Britain & Ireland, communicated by Robert Dundas of Arniston on behalf of Mrs Durham of Largo House (*Archaeol J*, 6 (1849), 75). Way subsequently published an illustrated discussion of the 'silver ornaments found at Largo' which marks a considerable advance in their study, but his main information on the discovery is taken from Buist whom he quotes *in extenso* (Way 1849). His illustrations were reproduced in 1851 by Daniel Wilson to accompany his account of the hoard in *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (511–20; rev edn 1863, 250–60). Wilson's own attempt to learn more of the discovery was unsuccessful, for 'though the person by whom the valuable hoard was purloined still resides, in good circumstances, at Pitlessie in Fife', he 'declines all communication on the subject' (1851, 512). Next, John Stuart reproduced Chalmers' (1848)

Plate 1.

Fragments in the possession of General Durham, Largely of a magnificent suit of silver armour, found at Norrie's Law, 1819.



ILLUS 1 George Buist's (1839) plate depicting objects from the Norrie's Law hoard, identified by him as 'fragments . . . of a magnificent suit of silver armour', including his reconstructions (nos 8 & 9) of the 'shield' and 'sword handle' (scale 2:3 of the original)

plate and description (which comprises a quotation from Buist) in vol I of his *Sculptured Stones of Scotland* (1856, 42–3, pl cxxxiii), but was inspired to undertake his own enquiries (forty years on) into the find circumstances and dispersal, publishing the results in vol II (1867, 77–9).

In the meantime the Archaeological Institute had held its annual summer meeting for 1856 in Edinburgh, when Mrs Dundas Durham of Largo lent to its museum ‘the silver ornaments, rings, hooks, fragments of plate, chain, &c., consisting of 153 objects and fragments, being the whole collection of reliques rescued by the late General Durham’ (Way 1859, 29). Eight years later, in 1864, she presented the greater part of the collection to the museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 6 (1864–6), 7–10, pls I & II, repeating Way’s accounts of 1849 and 1859), the remainder of the surviving material being donated by Robert Dundas of Arniston in 1883, his letter of 24 September to Joseph Anderson being bound, with other papers relating to the hoard, into a family copy of Buist which accompanied the donation (Anderson 1884, 239) and remains in the library of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (see appendix).

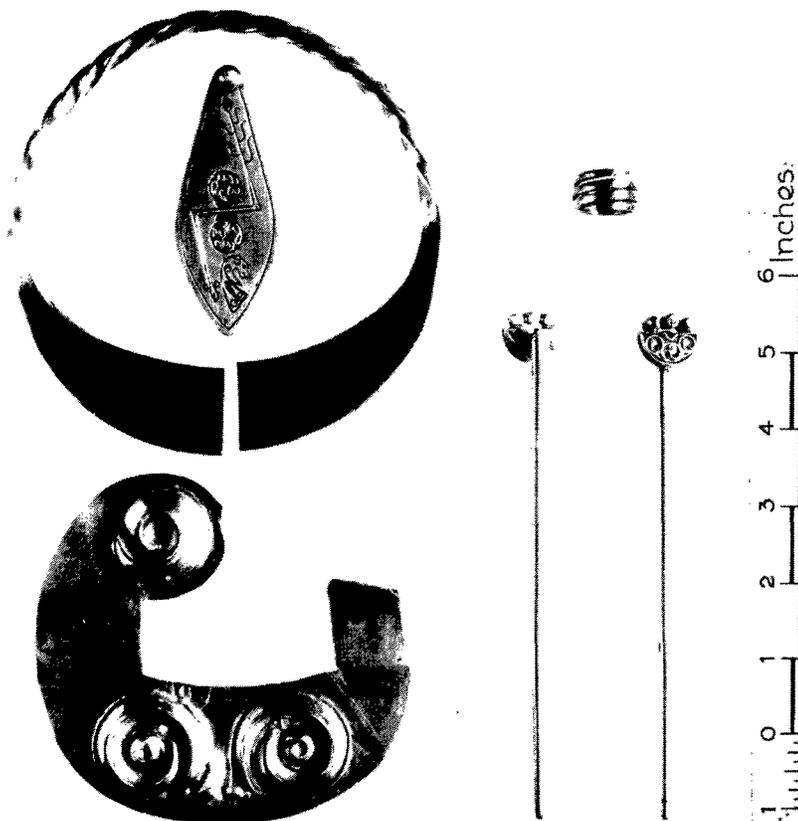
Joseph Anderson communicated a ‘Notice’ of ‘the silver ornaments, &c., found at Norrie’s Law’ to the Society on 10 March 1884, drawing on his account of the hoard in his 1880 Rhind lectures, published in 1881 (34–42, figs 24–8), in which he reviewed Buist’s and Stuart’s accounts of the discovery, but no new information had come to light in the interim. He returned briefly to some of the same material in his Rhind lectures for 1892, published as the introduction to Romilly Allen’s *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903, lxxxiii–lxxxv, fig 13).

In the *NMAS Catalogue* (1892, 204), the Norrie’s Law ‘Ornaments of Silver’ are registered as FC 26–126, although amongst them is the ‘second brass of Antonia Augusta struck by the Emperor Claudius, 41 A.D.’ (FC 39). There is, however, no 19th-century inventory or other documentation preserved in the National Museums of Scotland so that all 20th-century discussions of the hoard have been based on varying degrees of familiarity with the (often repetitive and occasionally contradictory) sources reviewed above.

THE SURVIVING CONTENTS

A total of 153 silver objects and fragments (excluding the two lost silver coins) were said to be in existence in the mid-19th century (Way 1859, 29), weighing about 24 oz (or 750 g), from an estimated total of silver discovered of ‘not much under 400 ounces of pure bullion’ (Buist 1839) – nearly 12.5 kg (Stevenson 1976, 248). What survives, therefore, is only about one-seventeenth of the original treasure by weight.

There are two exceptionally fine penannular brooches, with unique spiralled hoops and plain sub-triangular terminals (Way 1849, no 1; Anderson 1881, nos 1 & 2; illus 2); two oval plaques, bearing Pictish symbols, enamelled originally in red (Way no 3; Anderson nos 3 & 4; illus 2 & 5); three hand-pins, also originally enamelled (Way nos 4 & 5; Anderson nos 5–7), two being similar in size and style, although one has a Pictish symbol on the reverse of its head (Stevenson 1964; 1976, 248; illus 2 & 4), whereas the third is smaller and incomplete – and a fragmentary rod that is probably the pin of a fourth; a complete, but worn, spiral finger-ring (Way no 9; Anderson no 12; illus 2) and part of another; a small disc with raised border and central knob (Way no 6; Anderson no 8), with no means of attachment and so perhaps the lid of a vessel, and the remains of other discs; an incomplete, thick sheet with hollow-cast spiral bosses (Way no 2; Anderson no 9; illus 2); a crushed fragment of a fourth-century inscribed



ILLUS 2 Selection of silver objects from the Norrie's Law hoard, Fife (NMS)

Roman spoon (Stevenson 1956); band-shaped mounts with linear ornament (Anderson no 12), tentatively identified by Stevenson (1964; 1976, 248) as from knife-handles; fragments of plain arm-bands, with thickened, rounded terminals (Way no 7; Anderson no 10; cf Ó Floinn's hitherto unidentified armband terminals from Ireland in Youngs 1989, nos 25 & 26), perhaps spiral like that from the Gaulcross hoard (Stevenson 1964; 1976, 250; Youngs 1989, no 7c), as well as other bands of plain silver (including Way no 12; Anderson no 13); various plain rod and chain fragments (including Way no 8; Anderson no 14); but many of the fragments are of thin silver plate, unornamented except for some with a border of repoussé oblong bosses (Way no 11).

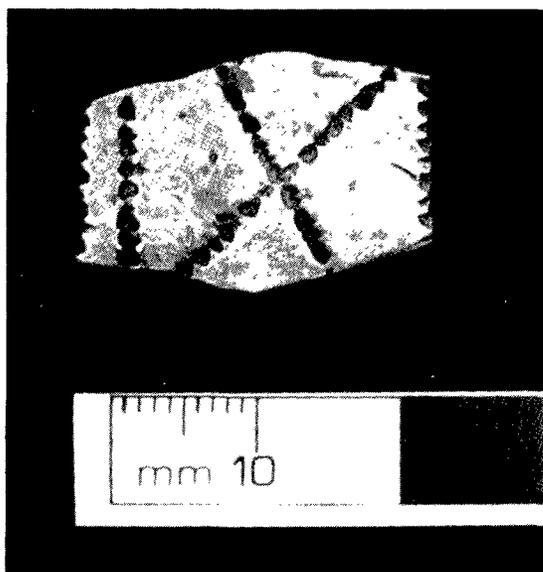
These last were interpreted by Way (*ibid*) as 'possibly the remains of the coating of a shield', on the grounds of its possible resemblance to 'the bronze plating of ancient British bucklers: the curve of one portion suffices to show that the circle measured 21 or 22 inches in diameter, which is only 3 or 4 inches less than the ordinary dimensions of the tarian.' It has subsequently been suggested that they represent the remains of a Roman dish, 400 mm in diameter, but as Stevenson has pointed out (1976, 249), they are too thin to have served this purpose and, anyway, seem to have been flat; in addition, two discs (45 mm in diameter) had been rivetted to them, but these no longer exist. The overall nature of this artefact does indeed

suggest the covering of a parade shield (Ritchie 1989, 54), small circular shields being depicted on several Pictish stones (Laing & Laing 1984b, 281). That some Picts possessed silver embellished weaponry is demonstrated by the eighth-century sword pommel and scabbard chapes in the St Ninian's Isle hoard, Shetland (Wilson 1973, nos 11, 15 & 16).

Amongst the Norrie's Law fragments in the National Museums of Scotland there is also a small band fragment, severed at both ends, with punched ornament in the form of a diagonal cross on its expanded mid-portion, with vertical impressions on either side (illus 3). The form and ornament are diagnostic of the main type of Hiberno-Viking arm-ring of ninth/tenth-century date (Graham-Campbell 1976, 51-3). There is, however, nothing else in this large assemblage to indicate that the Norrie's Law treasure is a Viking-age silver hoard, containing, exceptionally, both Late Roman and Pictish parcels, although the plain rod and chain fragments would not necessarily be out of place in one.²

Some explanation needs to be sought, therefore, as to how this fragment of Viking hack-silver came to be incorporated into the Norrie's Law assemblage of Late Roman and Pictish pieces. A detailed survey of the Viking-age silver found in Scotland (Graham-Campbell, forthcoming) has revealed no obviously missing piece that might, in the past, have become confused with the Norrie's Law material. For instance, it is clearly not that from the lost coinless hoard found to the south at Gordon in Berwickshire (Graham-Campbell 1976, 124, pl 14).

It seems probable that an unrecorded find of Viking silver was made on the Largo estate (whether or not at Norrie's Law itself), sometime in the 19th century (pre-1883), or earlier, so that the confusion of the finds had come about before the silver was donated to the Museum, but the lack of an original inventory leaves uncertain such a suggestion. That Viking-age treasure of Scandinavian character was buried and/or lost in this region is demonstrated by an annular gold arm-ring of three twisted rods found, in the late 18th century, across the Forth at Braidwood Castle (Fort), Penicuik, Midlothian (Wilson 1851,



ILLUS 3 Fragment of a silver arm-ring of Hiberno-Viking type, reputedly from Norrie's Law, Fife

318), although previously identified as an 'atypical' Early Iron Age torc of two twisted rods (Macgregor 1976, 94, no 190).

THE LOST CONTENTS

The two fourth-century silver coins belonging to the second parcel have been lost since the mid-19th century, when one was identified by W F Skene as being of Constantius II and the second (and later) as of Valens, who was emperor 364–78 (Wilson 1863, 260; Stuart 1867, 79). Also lost from the second parcel is a silver S-shaped link (Way 1849, 256, no 10), depicted by Buist who identified it as 'a small sword hook' (1839, pl 1, no 7; illus 1). In fact, such was Buist's enthusiasm for the 'Silver Armour' hypothesis (1839) that he interpreted the plate with raised scroll ornament as the mouth-piece of a large scabbard, but as Way was to comment 'it may safely be affirmed that it was not destined for such a purpose' (1849, 243).

As described above, the evidence for the lost contents of the first parcel consists of the twenty-year-old memories of Robertson, the Cupar jeweller who had purchased £35 worth of the silver, and of other individuals identified by him, together with his further recollections, recorded by Stuart in 1860 (1867, 78). Robertson's two accounts of the material that he handled can be combined with caution, although it is essential to bear in mind that he was convinced from the outset that it comprised a set of silver armour. In particular, he gave George Buist (1839) 'a most vivid description . . . of the rich carving of the shield, the helmet, and the sword handle, which were brought to him crushed in pieces to permit convenient transport and concealment'.

To Buist (1839), Robertson's description of the 'sword handle' suggested 'a large cross-hilted weapon, such as was commonly used with both hands', although 'no parts or relics of the blade were visible'. In consequence, little credence can be given to his anachronistic reconstruction (Buist 1839, pl 1, no 9; illus 1), even if it gives rise instead to speculation that the artefact behind Robertson's imaginative identification might have been the stem and plate of a Late Roman goblet or pedestalled platter, as present in the Traprain Law treasure (Curle 1923, pl xiii). Robertson also mentioned 'the tip of a large sword scabbard' (Leighton 1840, 134), or 'the point of a sheath' (Stuart 1867, 78), which might be interpreted as the crushed bowl or foot of such an object, rather than a U-shaped chape of the St Ninian's Isle variety.

Nothing more is recorded of the supposed helmet, but it might be suggested that this was a crushed silver vessel. If so, it would not necessarily have been of Late Roman manufacture, given the tradition of Pictish silver tableware represented by the beakers and bowls in the hoards from the Broch of Burgar, Orkney (Graham-Campbell 1985), and St Ninian's Isle, Shetland (Wilson 1973).

According to Robertson the supposed shield was 'heart-shaped and had upon it the figure of a man on horseback' (Leighton 1840, 135), and so it was sketched by Buist (1839, pl 1, no 8; illus 1), measuring '16 inches by 10', although the equestrian figure will have been reversed during block-making, in the same manner as the ornament on the plaques and hand-pin. Robertson subsequently described it to Stuart as 'a shield of old pointed shape, but much of which was wanting, although it appeared to have been embossed, and the design of the edge was distinct' (1867, 78), although Stuart himself dismissed Buist's reconstruction as being too 'modern' in type (as with the supposed sword-hilt). Given that Buist was a student of Pictish sculpture, it is certain that he would have interpreted Robertson's description of 'a man on horseback' in the light of the equestrian figures on Pictish stones, with the result that his reconstruction can be given only the most general credence.

One possibility is that the artefact which Robertson supposed to be a shield was the remains of a Late Roman picture dish, such as that from Kerch in the Crimea showing the emperor on horseback (Kent & Painter, eds, 1977, no 11) or possibly a Sassanian silver vessel, many of which show royal hunting scenes (*ibid*, nos 305, 307 & 308). It is not clear, however, whether or not the 'crushed' and 'wanting' object handled by Robertson would have been something as substantial as one of these grand dishes. Its maximum recorded dimension of approximately 400 mm is equivalent to that of the sheet silver mount, with repoussé border, that it was suggested above, might have been the covering of a parade shield. An equestrian warrior would have provided an appropriate device – if not symbol – for such a purpose, so perhaps Robertson was in this instance correct after all.

That prestigious Picts carried ornamented shields has for long been recognized from the depiction of that held by the leading figure on the stone from the Brough of Birsay, Orkney (Henderson 1967, pl 30; Ritchie 1989, 52–4), although in the context of Norrie's Law its spiral decorations bring more to mind the decoration of the substantial plaque of unknown function that Buist thought was a scabbard fitting.

Robertson also mentioned to Stuart 'eight bodkins' (1867, 78), bodkin being the term used by both Buist and Stuart for the surviving hand-pins, indicating that there were perhaps as many as a dozen in the hoard, although amongst these pins may well have been those for the penannular brooches. In addition, he stated that there was 'a very large number of scales or plates, some of which had hooks attached' and 'a number of coins' (*ibid*).

Buist (1839) identified the plates as the remains of 'a rich coat of scale-armour, the pieces of which consisted of small-sized lozenge-shaped plates of silver, suspended loosely by a hook from the upper corner', the extant oval plaques being identified as 'lozenge-shaped plates', although they are without any suspension arrangements. Some of these 'scales' were acquired by a local farmer to make heads for some staffs, but Leighton reported (1840, 135) that he had seen 'in his possession, one or two of the links by which the scales were connected'.

A large collection of hooked or linked plates suggests one or more elaborate breast ornaments or necklaces with pendants, produced in a Late Roman tradition, as in the Byzantine world (eg Kent & Painter, eds, 1977, nos 163 & 190, but cf no 98, the silver horse trappings from the Esquiline treasure). However, as not all the plates had hooks attached more than one type of artefact must be represented by these articles. It seems highly probable that they included further examples of the extant oval plaques which lack any means of attachment. They are normally discussed as a pair (illus 5), but this evidence indicates that they are more likely to have been two of a series. Whatever these 'scales or plates' were, it is clear from Robertson's evidence to Stuart (1867, 78) that they constituted the major part of the first parcel of the hoard and thus of the entire Norrie's Law treasure.

As for the supposed 'coins', of which there was said to be 'a number', it would be unwise to leap to the obvious conclusion that they comprised more fourth-century Roman coins, like the two that formed part of the second parcel, for, according to Leighton (1840, 135), 'it is said by those who have seen some of them, that they contained no inscriptions but were marked with symbols similar to those on the oval plates', while Buist (1839) reported that they are 'said to have borne the symbolic markings'.

So what are these symbol-marked oval plaques and their coin-shaped equivalents? Thomas (1961, 44) suggested that the former were essentially Roman *phalerae*, but he was under the mistaken impression that they had attachment fittings. Laing & Laing (1984a, 263–4; 1990, 135) have proposed, as an alternative, that they are in the tradition of Roman votive plaques; to their parallels might be added the pair of oval bone plaques from the fifth/sixth-

century shrine excavated at Cadbury Congresbury in Somerset (Burrow 1981, fig 32; Rahtz 1982, 188, fig 4). On the other hand, the single decorated boss at the top of each plaque is suggestive of a skeuomorphic rivet head.³

It was Way who first posed the question: 'May they not have been destined for some mystic or magical purpose?' (1849, 255). The suggestion that the symbol-marked discs and oval plaques from Norrie's Law were votive or at least ceremonial in function may be supported by reference to the lost bronze crescent from the Laws, Monifieth, near Dundee, which carries symbols on *both* sides, so that it has no obvious practical function (Roger 1880; Anderson 1881, 45–7, figs 33–4). One side is strikingly similar to the Norrie's Law plaques in that it combines the double disc and Z-rod symbol with the rare beast head.

THE NATURE OF THE HOARD

Before considering the deposition date of the Norrie's Law hoard, it is desirable to summarize what it has been possible to establish concerning the overall nature of the treasure so as to be able to contrast it with potentially comparable finds. In so far as can now be determined, the Norrie's Law hoard comprised a mixture of Late Roman and native Pictish silver, in an unknown proportion, but on the basis of the surviving material the proven Roman element is small and there is no reason to suppose from the 19th-century sources that the lost material was such as to require any significant modification to this observation.

Leaving aside the date of the Pictish silver for the present, the overall contents should be compared with those of the Late Roman treasures amongst which Laing has suggested that the Norrie's Law hoard belongs (1990, 41). There are three such that have been found on or beyond the north-west frontiers of the Empire – that from nearby Traprain Law in East Lothian (Curle 1923), and those from Coleraine and Balline in Ireland (Bateson 1973, Appendix C, nos 2 & 23, with refs).

The Coleraine (or Ballinrees), Co Londonderry, hoard comprised 1701 coins and 55 pieces of bullion weighing just over 200 oz, consisting of ingots, a complete bowl, fragments of plate and other items, some with chip-carved ornament; its deposition is estimated as 420/25. The Balline hoard, from Co Limerick, contained no coins and consists only of four ingots and three plate fragments, all fourth century in date. The distinctive cow-hide shaped ingots that form an important element in both these hoards were clearly absent from the Norrie's Law treasure, which also does not seem to have contained any chip-carved ornaments. Conversely, the Irish hoards contain no native artefacts.

The Traprain Law hoard is considerably larger, containing 24 kg of silver (that is double the weight of Norrie's Law) in the form of more than 150 objects, many of which are substantial, with but four coins; it was deposited in the early to mid-fifth century. The contents comprise mainly table silver, but include articles from a lady's dressing table and from an officer's uniform, the latter with chip-carved ornament. At the basic level of overall visual comparison, the two hoards appear completely mismatched – the silver from Traprain Law is massive and ornate, whereas that from Norrie's Law is generally slight and largely plain. Of greater significance, however, is the fact that Traprain Law contains none of the native artefacts that characterize Norrie's Law – no hand-pins, arm-bands, penannular brooches, or symbol-ornamented plaques.

On these grounds it is necessary to reject Laing's description (1990, 41) of the Traprain Law hoard as 'a similar kind of cache' to that from Norrie's Law, even if the latter does contain a few pieces of Late Roman silver and may once have contained more. If it is accepted that the

Norrie's Law hoard differs from these late fourth/early fifth-century Late Roman treasures then there is no reason why it should have been deposited contemporaneously.

At the other end of the scale, the Norrie's Law hoard contrasts as strongly in overall appearance and contents with those hoards of Pictish metalwork from the far north which are conventionally dated to the late eighth/early ninth century, from Rogart in Sutherland, from the Broch of Burgar on Orkney, and from St Ninian's Isle, Shetland (Wilson 1973; Graham-Campbell 1985). As mentioned at the outset, the closest parallel is provided by the Gaulcross hoard, likewise largely lost and left with even less dating evidence than Norrie's Law (Stevenson 1964; Ralston & Inglis 1984, no 25; Youngs 1989, no 7). The only remaining course is to determine the date of manufacture of the latest pieces in the Norrie's Law hoard in order to establish a *terminus post quem* for its deposition.

THE DEPOSITION DATE

Stevenson has argued on a number of occasions, already cited, that various of the ornamented items under consideration were manufactured during the seventh century, as also the plain penannular brooches with twisted hoops (1974, 32–3).⁴ Chief amongst them are (i) the spiral-bossed plaque, (ii) the mounts with linear ornament, and (iii) the two matched hand-pins, whereas (iv) the two oval plaques 'date about A.D.700 or later' (1955, 110).

(i) THE SPIRAL-BOSSED PLAQUE (illus 2)

For Laing this is the earliest object in the hoard, as it is 'closely related to the Monasterevin [Co Kildare] discs and could belong to the second century' (1990, 41), although Piggott took this 'striking' similarity to be 'clear evidence for the continuity of the style' (1970, 33, no 173), while Macgregor (1976, no 349) categorized it as a 'decorative survival' (*ibid*, pl xvi, c). Although the use of embossed curvilinear decoration became rare after the Roman Iron Age, it did not entirely disappear (Youngs 1989, 20–1), as is shown by the mouldings on the Ardakillen bow-brooch, Co Roscommon (*ibid*, no 58), the studs on the Manton hanging-bowl, South Humberside (*ibid*, no 34), and the base of an animal-headed mount found recently at Coddendam, Suffolk (S Youngs, pers comm), as well as the boar's head mounts on the large hanging-bowl from the Sutton Hoo ship-burial (Bruce-Mitford 1983, 217–19, fig 167), all of which are attributable to the seventh century. The unique Ardakillen brooch is strikingly similar to the Norrie's Law plaque in sharing its fat *ridged* scrolls; it has a ?tinned and dot-outlined reverse which are 'regular features of Irish metalwork from the later sixth century onwards' (Ryan *in* Youngs 1989, 63). It is not surprising, therefore, that the Megaws comment in their recent overview of Celtic art that 'this plaque has been set by some writers at a relatively early date, but could well be a much later (seventh-century) import from Ireland' (1989, 253, although in the caption to their illus 405 it is dated more generally to '2nd–6th c. AD').

These parallels mean that, in dealing with this unique plaque, there can be no firm basis for its dating. On the other hand, if it can be demonstrated that there is seventh-century material in the Norrie's Law hoard, then it would clearly be the most economical hypothesis to suppose that it is of sixth/seventh-century manufacture rather than five centuries old on deposition.

(ii) THE MOUNTS WITH LINEAR ORNAMENT

The linear ornament on fragments of three silver bands, tentatively identified by Stevenson as from knife-handles, is formed from parallelograms or triangles with dots or circles at their centres (1964, 208, fig 1; 1976, 248, fig 1). This, Stevenson has suggested (1976, 248), 'might be an elaboration of the elongated curvilinear pattern on the outside of the central hatched frame of Sutton Hoo's large hanging-bowl'. This analogy was endorsed by Bruce-Mitford in his discussion of the Sutton Hoo frames, commenting that 'this type of design does not seem to be represented in the Irish material' (1983, 274, fig 210, c). There is, however, a copper-alloy mount from the River Shannon ornamented with a variety of transverse linear patterns, including dotted triangles, having close similarities to Norrie's Law, as noted by Ó Floinn (*in* Youngs 1989, no 13), which serves to highlight the stylistic relevance of the Sutton Hoo frames for Stevenson's dating of the Norrie's Law mounts to the seventh century, as also its two matched hand-pins which have analagous ornament on their edges.

(iii) THE TWO MATCHED HAND-PINS (illus 2 & 4)

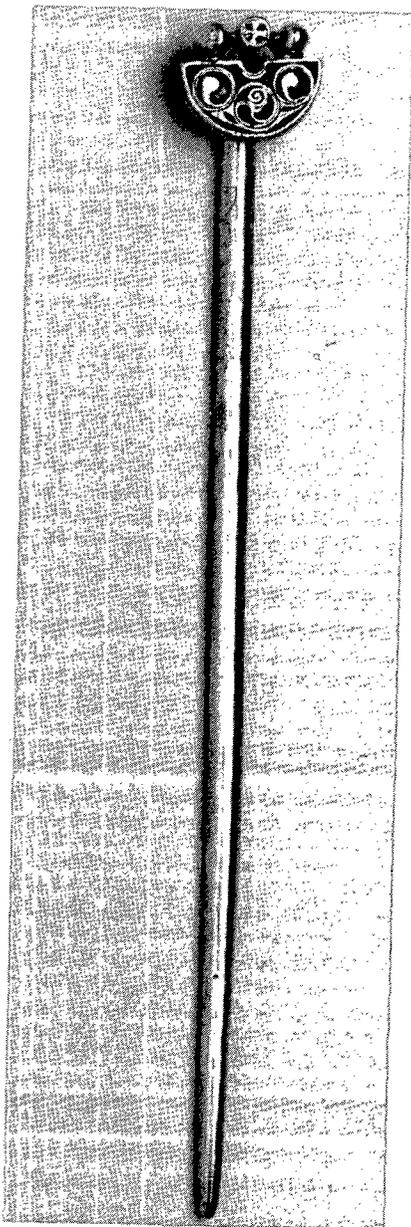
Hand-pins have their origins in Late Roman period contexts in Britain, but it is generally agreed that the type has a long chronology, remaining fashionable into the seventh century (as Youngs, Ryan, Webster, Bourke and Spearman *in* Youngs (1989, 23–7), thus matching the degree of conservatism displayed in Ireland by the use of zoomorphic penannular brooches. In consequence it is essential in dating individual pins to ensure that both typological and stylistic criteria are combined, but even so a particular example is liable to be placed early or late in the sequence according to personal preference.

Stevenson's arguments for their seventh-century manufacture need not be repeated here (1964, 207–9; 1976, 248; see also Henderson 1979, 22–3), but an additional argument may be developed in support of such a date for the hand-pin which Stevenson demonstrated to be the later of the two (1964, 207). This pin has a Pictish Z-rod symbol on the reverse of its head (illus 2), whereas a Maltese cross occupies a prominent position on the front (illus 4), filling its central 'finger' against an enamelled background (Fowler 1963, 129). Such crosses are found on the enamelled terminals of a group of Irish zoomorphic penannular brooches which Ó Floinn dates to the late sixth/early seventh century, noting their 'remarkably close' parallels in the Cathac manuscript of c 600 (*in* Youngs 1989, no 16; Graham-Campbell 1991, 229).

In a Pictish context, an artefact with a cross on the front and a symbol on the reverse is clearly akin to a Class II Christian stone monument, thus belonging to a chronological horizon no earlier than the seventh century. The head of this pin is described by Stevenson as having 'sharp and unworn' edges (1964, 207).

(iv) THE TWO OVAL PLAQUES (illus 5)

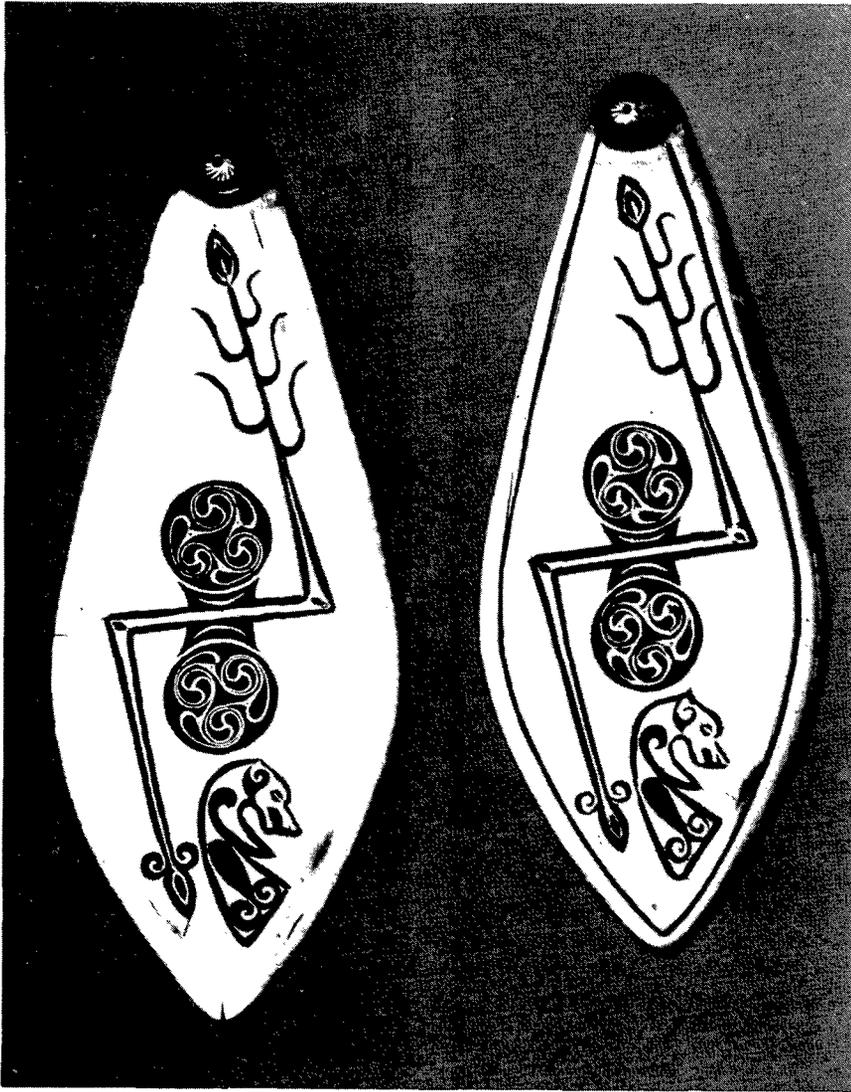
The two, nearly identical, oval plaques are, in Stevenson's words, 'perhaps the freshest objects in the hoard' (1976, 249) so that their dating is the remaining critical factor in establishing the *terminus post quem* for its deposition. In general terms these symbol-bearing plaques are stylistically representative of the Class I Pictish stone monuments, when paired or grouped symbols were incised on a plain ground, in this case the double disc and Z-rod with the rare beast head in profile. This particular combination is present on the Rhynie, Aberdeenshire, stone (Henderson 1979, 25, pl iii), in the Doo Cave, East Wemyss, Fife (*ibid*, 26), as well as on the Laws crescentic plaque mentioned above. The Norrie's Law double disc



ILLUS 4 Silver hand-pin, decorated with red enamel, from the Norrie's Law hoard, Fife (length 17 cm). NMS

and Z-rod symbol resembles closely that on the terminal ring of the double-linked silver chain from Whitecleugh, Lanarkshire (*ibid*).

Henderson has recently commented (1989, 211) that 'The Beast's Head symbol has a naturalistic dog head very similar indeed to the naturalistic dogs which are a novel feature of the decoration of the Lindisfarne Gospels (early eighth century)'; she thus endorses



ILLUS 5 Two silver plaques, decorated with red enamel, from the Norrie's Law hoard, Fife (length 9.1 cm). NMS

Stevenson's earlier observations that these animal heads are 'typologically very close' (1955, 110) and 'very closely related' (1964, 208). Yet this parallel has been lightly dismissed by others, notably Thomas who found only a 'supposed resemblance' (1961, 44) and Laing who saw merely a 'superficial similarity' (1975, 56). The explanation for this contradiction must be that they have looked at different Lindisfarne dogs, given that 'the dog-motif appears 499 times' in the Lindisfarne Gospels (Bruce-Mitford 1960, 201) and not always in forms that might be described as 'very similar' or 'very close' to the Norrie's Law beast head.

However, a detailed formal analysis of the Norrie's Law beast head and standard dog heads in the Lindisfarne Gospels, like that forming part of the initial P on f 5v (illus 6), would demonstrate the essential truth of Stevenson's and Henderson's observations. In brief, the

head is in profile with a single projecting, pointed ear, with a basal spiral from which extends the line that segregates head from neck; there is a strongly curved forehead over a prominent eye, with a straight upper edge to the muzzle; the jaws are closed and the mouth is represented by a single line with a downward curve, balanced by a single upward curving line to indicate the nostril. All the basic aspects of the head and their delineation are treated identically in the two media.

Although the Lindisfarne animal ornament is a novelty, Bruce-Mitford pointed out that 'Eadfrith was certainly not using bird and dog ornament for the first time – the themes are fully assimilated into an Insular convention' (1960, 196). In fact, as Henderson has pointed out (1979, 25), distinctive features of the profile beast head are already present in the Lion symbol in the Book of Durrow, if more clearly in the later Echternach Calf (Henderson 1987, figs 64 & 110). The dating of Durrow has been much debated (cf Roth 1987), but there is considerable support for a date in the third quarter of the seventh century (eg Henderson 1987, 55), perhaps as early as 650 (eg Haseloff 1987, 46).

It seems highly improbable that the Norrie's Law beast head had evolved in every detail 200–300 years before its use in Durrow/Echternach/Lindisfarne, remaining in abeyance during the interim, as would be necessitated by Laing's early dating of the hoard's deposition. Yet there is no way in which the plaques may be dated precisely. It can only be suggested that the stylistic parallels cited above indicate their manufacture during the period from the middle to the end of the seventh century, or even as late as the opening years of the eighth. Whether one opts for a date early (as Henderson) or late (as Stevenson) within this range depends on how one views the direction of the migration of such ideas between Pictish and Northumbrian art.

CONCLUSION

There seems little reason to doubt that a significant quantity of the Norrie's Law silver is most reasonably to be attributed a seventh-century date (and none is necessarily later), while some is clearly of Late Roman manufacture. Given that there are only circumstantial descriptions of its discovery, it is impossible to discount entirely the possibility of there having been more than one hoard deposited at Norrie's Law, but there is nothing in the surviving evidence to indicate that this must have been so (leaving aside the enigma of the Hiberno-Viking arm-ring fragment). Balancing all the factors presented by the Norrie's Law treasure, the most economical conclusion is that the Late Roman and Pictish silver represents a single hoard deposited at some point during the second half of the seventh century, quite possibly as early as the Northumbrian conquest of Fife in 655 – or perhaps during the ensuing thirty-year period of occupation – to prevent such a substantial quantity of native wealth from falling into the hands of the new Anglian overlords. On the other hand, if one was persuaded by Stevenson's date for the oval plaques, the burying of the hoard during the Pictish-Northumbrian wars at the beginning of the eighth century remains a possibility.



ILLUS 6 Initial P from the Lindisfarne Gospels (British Library MS Cotton Nero D IV, folio 5v)

NOTES

- 1 This article is an expanded version of a paper read at 'The Age of Migrating Ideas' conference in Edinburgh, January 1991, while 'The Work of Angels' exhibition was on display at the National Museums of Scotland (see Higgitt & Spearman, eds, forthcoming 1993).
- 2 None of the Viking-age hoards known from Scotland appears to contain a mixture of Pictish and Norse silver artefacts, although it has been suggested that two pieces of hack-silver from over 1000 in the Cuerdale, Lancs, hoard (deposited c 905) are the work of Pictish silversmiths (Graham-Campbell 1985, 251–3, illus 3 & 5; 1987, 337–8).
- 3 In drawing attention to inset plates on *Spangenhelme*, such as that from Krefeld-Gellep grave 1782 (as Werner 1988, Abb 1), Stevenson (*in* Higgitt & Spearman, eds, forthcoming 1993) indicates how the Norrie's Law plaques might have been attached to some such artefact by means of a frame, although there remains the possibility that they were left unfinished – or, at least, were never used.
- 4 These distinctive brooches merit full discussion in this context, but such would require a complete reappraisal of Fowler's Type H to which they have been attributed (1963, 110, 142).

APPENDIX

MANUSCRIPT SOURCES FOR THE NORRIE'S LAW HOARD

Along with the silver ornaments found at Norrie's Law, 'Mr Dundas also presented several letters on the subject of the relics from the late Dr John Stuart and others, and two copies of the scarce "Report, by Mr George Buist . . ." (Anderson 1884, 239). The copy of Buist (1839) from the Library of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland has bound into it the following documents:

- (i) an unsigned print of crossed hand-pins, etc (Chalmers 1848, pl 23, reproduced as Stuart 1856, pl cxxxiii);
- (ii) a letter from Robert Dundas to Joseph Anderson (24 Sept. 1883), concerning the donation;
- (iii) a letter from William Skene to General Durham (undated), accompanying the return of 'the box with the antiquities to Largo', suggesting that the silver coins are of Vespasian;
- (iv) two letters from John Stuart to Mrs Durham (22 Aug. & 3 Sept. 1864), during his investigation into the discovery of the hoard (for which see Stuart 1867, 77–9);

(v) an anonymous manuscript report, entitled 'Two Coins found at Norrie's Law', to be identified with the 'Memorandum by George Sim, Esq., Edinburgh' referred to by Stuart (1867, 79, note 2).

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