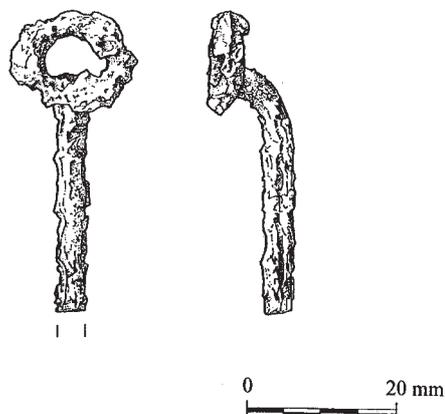


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## 5 The ring-headed pin by *Adrian Cox*

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*Illus 5 Loch Borrallie cairn: the ring headed pin*

An iron ring-headed pin (*Illus 5*) was recovered from the deposit of red-brown sand (005), under cairn material (002: [Section 3.2](#)). Ring-headed pins were used to fasten garments, in conjunction with a thread wound around the shaft and tied to the head. Many excavated examples are of copper alloy, either cast in a single piece or fashioned from wire, but iron examples are known.

It is a **projecting ring-headed pin** with a plain, circular head and a circular or oval cross-sectioned shaft. The shaft is broken at a point 29 mm below the lowest part of the head. Surviving length 40 mm; diameter of head (disregarding corrosion products) 13 mm; thickness of shaft 4 mm (context 005; Find No 1).

Stevenson noted the possibility of the projecting ring-headed pins being a native development, although influenced by the design of Late Bronze

Age sunflower pins, and suggested a date-range between the second and third centuries AD for this type, although an earlier date is not ruled out ([Stevenson 1955](#), 288). Two copper-alloy pins with projecting ring heads were recovered from the Crosskirk broch site in Caithness, and dates in the second century BC were suggested for these ([Fairhurst 1984](#), 116). Examples excavated at Howe, Orkney are from contexts dating around the second century BC to the fourth century AD ([Ballin Smith 1994](#), 222).

More recent excavations have produced both late and early dating evidence for the type. At Scalloway, a copper alloy ring-headed pin was recovered from the phase 1 occupation of the broch, which was sealed by a destruction event radiocarbon-dated to cal AD345–505 ([Sharples 1998](#), 29–30). Further afield, a wire-type, iron ring-headed pin came from the fire–destruction deposit on the floor of the Middle Iron Age roundhouse at South Shields ([Croom 2002](#), 141–43), a context dated 390–170 cal BC.

Other examples of similar, wire-type, iron ring-headed pins have been recovered from graves at Moredun and Boysack Mills. At Moredun a cist contained a crouched inhumation accompanied by a ring-headed pin, an iron pennanular brooch and an iron dolphin brooch ([Coles 1904](#); [Close-Brooks 1984](#), 89). Another ring-headed pin was recovered from the central grave within a square-ditched barrow at Boysack Mills, Angus ([Murray and Ralston 1997](#), *illus 9*). That pin appears to have accompanied a supine inhumation orientated south-east to north-west. The radiocarbon dates from the Boysack Mills grave, however, appear to relate to later activity in the early part of the second millennium AD and consequently the date of the burial was unclear.