

On 8 April, the Appleby Archaeology Group was delighted to welcome back Dot Boughton, Lancashire and Cumbria Portable Antiquities Scheme Liaison Officer, to talk about the Silverdale and Furness Viking hoards and other recent finds from Lancashire and Cumbria. The Portable Antiquities Scheme employs a nationwide network of Finds Liaison Officers to record objects that have been found by individuals such as dogwalkers, metal detectorists, fieldwalkers, amateur archaeologists, farmers and other outdoor workers. Without this scheme, such finds would go unrecorded and the heritage information they embody would be lost for ever. The act of digging them up or removing them from where they were found does destroy their context, but where they were found, what with and any other archaeology in the area are significant facts to record.

Under the current law, if the found items are not legally defined as treasure trove, they belong to the finder, but the importance of recording them is increasingly being recognised both by the government and by the general public. The Scheme's success can be seen from the sheer number of objects reported; in February 2012 the PAS database included 500,000 separate objects; by 2014 that number had increased to over 1,000,000 objects, grouped into records when found together. The huge numbers and wide variety of objects mean that in future, only items earlier than 1700 AD will be recorded. Since 1996, the Treasure Act rules governing ownership and reporting of finds has been changed; any object over 300 years old and containing over 10% of gold or silver must be reported within 14 days. Under these rules, the Crosby Garrett helmet was not treasure, and was therefore not reported. Both the Furness and Silverdale hoards were classified as treasure trove.

The Furness Hoard, found in May 2011, consisted of 79 silver coins (including two Arabic dirhams), a silver bracelet, a silver brooch and various smaller pieces of silver. Dated to around 955-965AD, it is not an amazing find but is of particular interest because it is a very late hoard, and unusually the items are comparable to Viking material from the Atlantic seaboard, especially the Isle of Man and Scotland rather than the more familiar eastern material from York. The Furness hoard can be seen at the Dock Museum at Barrow-in-Furness (see illustration).

The so-called Silverdale Hoard (actually found at Yelland) is somewhat larger and more impressive. Found in September 2011, it comprises 200 silver objects, including a large number of coins, including four Arabic dirhams, one from Tashkent, five big bracelets or torcs, finger ingots, pieces of harness, pins brooches and smaller pieces. Some exceptionally rare coins from the reigns of Athelwold (900-902AD) and Harthacnute (895-905AD) were identified, and an unusual nest of three bracelets, notable for their Viking Irish, Scandinavian and Merovingian design, some with inlay. Remarkably, all the items were buried inside an inverted lead container, the only one ever found in the UK, and therefore of great interest and value in spite of its quite humble material. After an initial period on display at the Lancaster City Museum, the Silverdale Hoard (see illustration) is now housed at the Museum of Lancashire at Preston.

While not as impressive as the huge Cuerdale Hoard of 8,600 items, found by workmen on the banks of the River Ribble near Preston on 15 May 1841, and the largest Viking silver

hoard ever found outside Russia, these two more recent local finds at Furness and Silverdale are still very impressive and well worth a visit to appreciate their marvellous workmanship as well as the benefits of having and supporting the Portable Antiquities Scheme. From a personal point of view Dot - an Anglo Saxon specialist - has had to wait years for a major find in Cumbria, then two come along within a year! After taking a wide range of questions from the highly appreciative audience, Dot was thanked very warmly for a fascinating and inspiring talk, made the more memorable by such brilliant illustrations.

Stephen Walker

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