

THE HISTORY OF TIREE IN 100 OBJECTS - no. 10

VIKING 'TORTOISE' BROOCH

This Norse brooch was found somewhere on Tiree in the nineteenth century. This style of oval brass jewellery, known as a 'tortoise' brooch because of its shape, was very popular among Viking women in the ninth and tenth centuries, so much so that they were often buried with them. They were worn in pairs on the front of the chest, holding up a woollen, apron-like overdress. The brooches were made in two halves with a plain domed back, and an intricate pattern on the front with the 'bosses', or pointed bits, often studded with amber or glass.

This report was written about this brooch when it was handed in to the museum.

'One of a pair found in the island of Tiree was presented to the [National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh] in June 1872 by the late Rev Dr Norman MacLeod [*Caraid nan Gàidheal*, a well-known Gaelic-speaking minister in Glasgow, who is likely to have known many Tiree people]. Nothing further is known concerning the circumstances of their discovery than that they were found in a grave along with the peculiarly-shaped and massive bronze pin here figured...This brooch measures $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in breadth and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height. It is double, the under part having a flat rim with a band of lacertine [intertwined] ornamentation in panels. The plain portion of the under shell has been gilt [covered with a thin layer of silver or gold]. The upper shell has a raised boss in the centre, pierced with four openings. Two similar bosses are placed at the extremities of the longer and shorter diameters of the oval, and halfway between each pair of these bosses there are spaces for beads or studs, four in number, which have been fastened on by rivets of brass, one of which still remains *in situ* [in place]. From the central boss to the other bosses there are channelled depressions in the metal, in which are laid three rows of a small silver chain formed of two strands of a very fine wire twisted together, and forming a double diamond figure on the oval surface of the brooch. On 15th March 1847 a notice of a similar brooch found in Tiree was read to the [Society of Antiquaries of Scotland] and the brooch exhibited by Sir John Graham Dalzell [an Edinburgh advocate, very interested in archaeology]. It is described as 'resembling, to minuteness, several in the Museum' and as these brooches usually occur in pairs, it was probably found with the one presented by Rev Dr MacLeod.'