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Notes

SETTLEMENT SHIFT AT COTTAM, EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE, AND THE CHRONOLOGY OF ANGLO-SAXON COPPER-ALLOY PINS

Copper-alloy dress pins were a common and easily lost costume accessory of middle Anglo-Saxon and late-Saxon England. Their function is uncertain, although the location of pins on the upper torso in female graves of the early Anglo-Saxon period has led Walton Rogers to conclude that they generally pinned a veil, lightweight scarf or shawl.¹ In his 1991 doctoral thesis, Seamus Ross argued that they may have had multiple functions, pinning veils and headbands, and holding up plaited hair.² At that stage most pins had been recovered from burial contexts, from early Anglo-Saxon graves. Ross identified 83 different types, but he was unable to refine the chronology within the middle Anglo-Saxon and late-Saxon forms of the 8th–10th centuries AD.³ Hinton and Parsons, in writing up the finds from middle Anglo-Saxon Southampton, categorised the pins into nine types A–I, but provided no chronology.⁴ Since then they have become a characteristic find from so-called ‘productive sites’, frequently from unprovenanced metal-detected contexts, so that there are now several hundred new examples listed in the Portable Antiquities Scheme database.⁵

The settlement shift identified at the productive site known as Cottam B, between the Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian periods, provides an opportunity to examine the transition in a number of artefact forms, and suggests a clear change in the popularity of pin types between the 9th and 10th centuries. Indeed, re-examination of the finds distribution demonstrates that the category of faceted pins undergoes a major decline in use in the 9th century when disc-headed forms replace them.

THE COTTAM B ANGLIAN AND ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN SETTLEMENTS

Cottam B lies on farmland high on the Yorkshire Wolds, between Driffield and Malton (Fig 1). Metal detectorists first recognised it in the 1980s.⁶ Plotting of the metal finds had revealed two concentrations of finds and archaeological investigation of the site in the early 1990s demonstrated that there were two adjacent but related settlements, the Anglian settlement going out of use in the late 9th century, to be replaced by a new Anglo-Scandinavian farmstead some 200 m to the north-east.⁷ Several datable finds, such as 8th-century chip-carved pin heads and the majority of the Northumbrian stycas were found in the southern concentration, whereas Anglo-Scandinavian artefacts, including two decorative bells, were only found in the northern one.⁸ In addition, fieldwalking demonstrated that sherds of 10th-century Torksey ware were also

¹ Walton Rogers 2007, 159–61.

² Ross 1991, 391–433.

³ *Ibid.*, 365–81.

⁴ Hinton and Parsons 1996.

⁵ Portable Antiquities Scheme, <www.finds.org.uk; the VASLE database> [accessed May 2006] contains 426 pins: Richards et al 2009.

⁶ Haldenby 1990; 1992; 1994.

⁷ Richards et al 1999.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 9–12, illus 5–6.

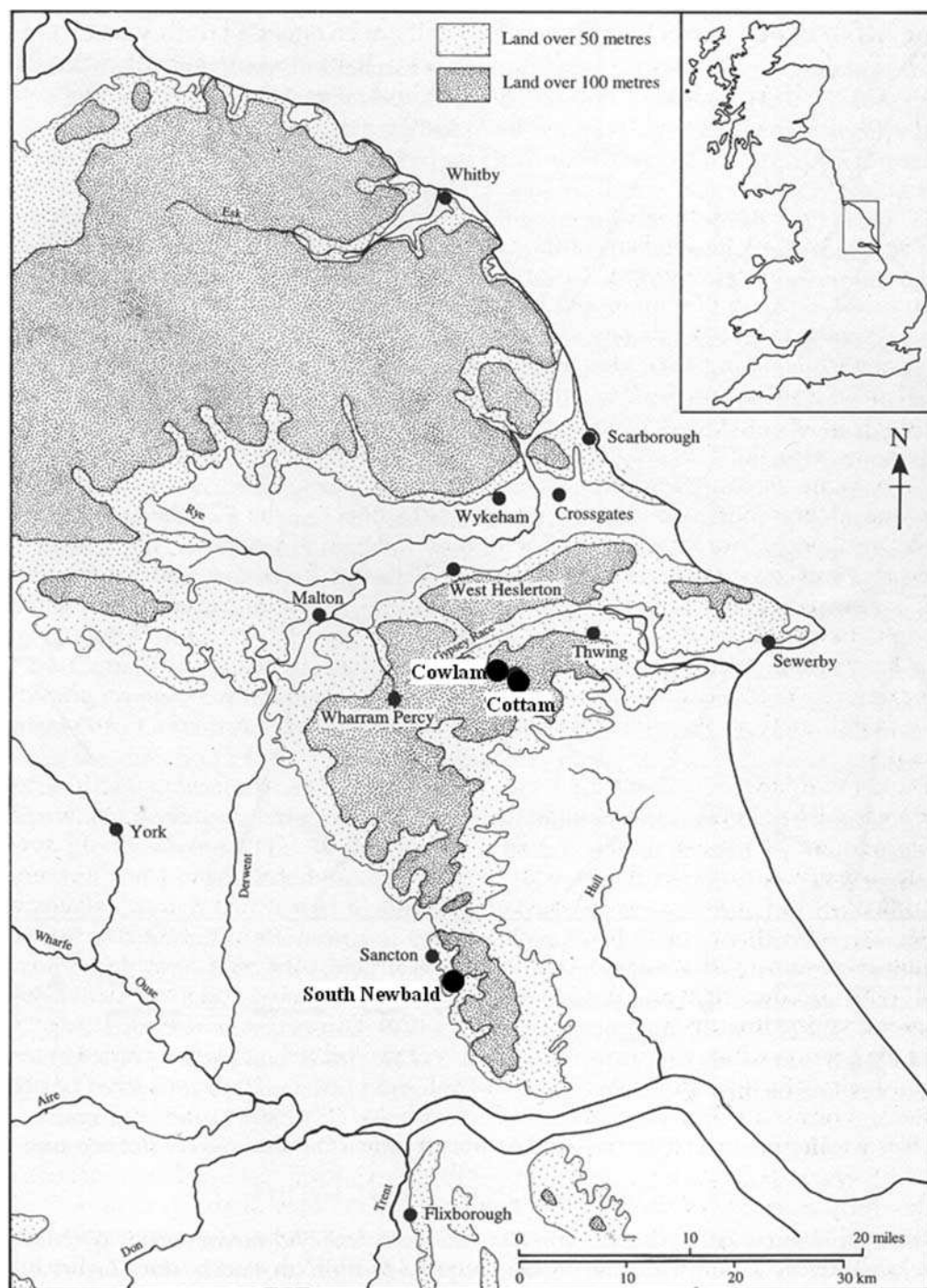


FIG 1

Map showing location of Cottam and other sites mentioned in the text. © D Haldenby and J D Richards.

concentrated in the northern area.⁹ As well as traditional publication, the results of the fieldwork are available electronically, including an associated digital archive, enabling further study.¹⁰

Since Cottam B comprises two substantial and adjacent finds assemblages of consecutive date, with good horizontal stratigraphy, the site provides a unique opportunity to observe the artefactual transition between Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian society. For example, the original report recognised that strap ends with geometric or related decoration were found only in the southern area, giving strong support to Thomas's contention that this type of strap end went out of use earlier than those forms with Trehiddle-style animal ornament that are found in equal numbers in each area and must continue in use.¹¹ At that stage, however, the pins had not been classified in detail and the distribution showed a general spread.¹² Our present analysis classifies them in accordance with the following scheme.

SIMPLE COPPER-ALLOY PINS

Facetted-headed pins commonly have cuboid heads with chamfered corners, creating 13 faces (Fig 2). A sub-group, the mallet-headed variety, have more flattened

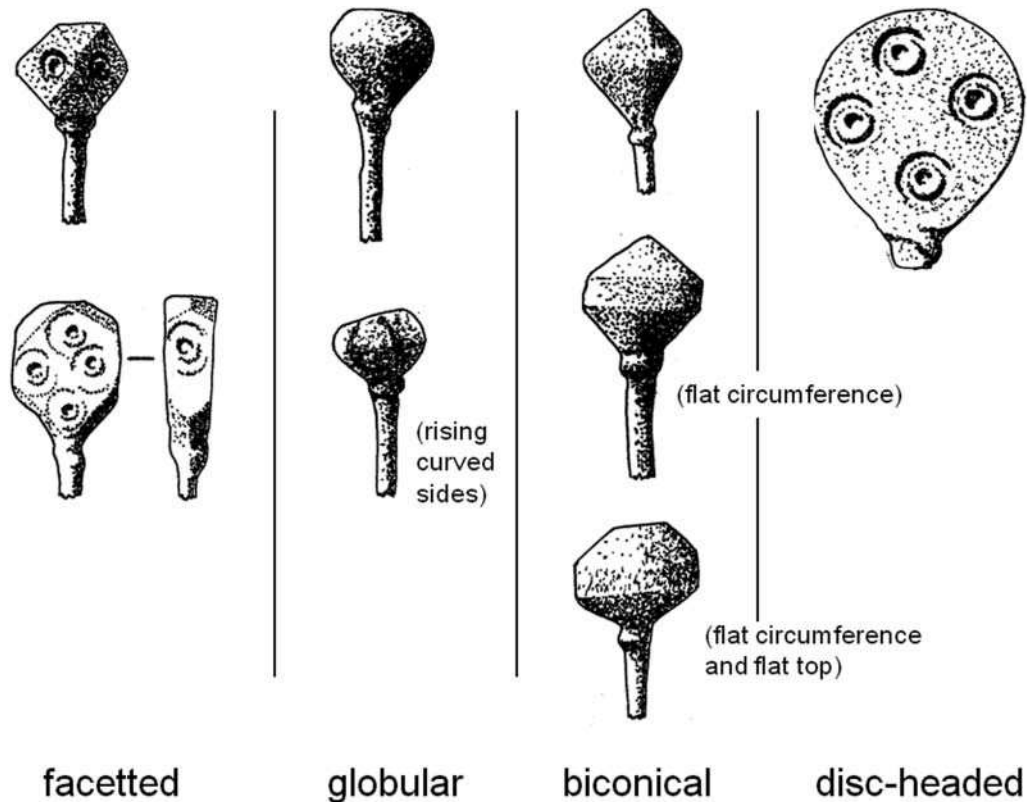


FIG 2

Main types of Anglo-Saxon copper-alloy pins. © D Haldenby and J D Richards.

⁹ Ibid, 15, illus 9.

¹⁰ Richards 2001a; 2001b.

¹¹ Thomas 2006, 157.

¹² Richards et al 1999, 10, illus 7.

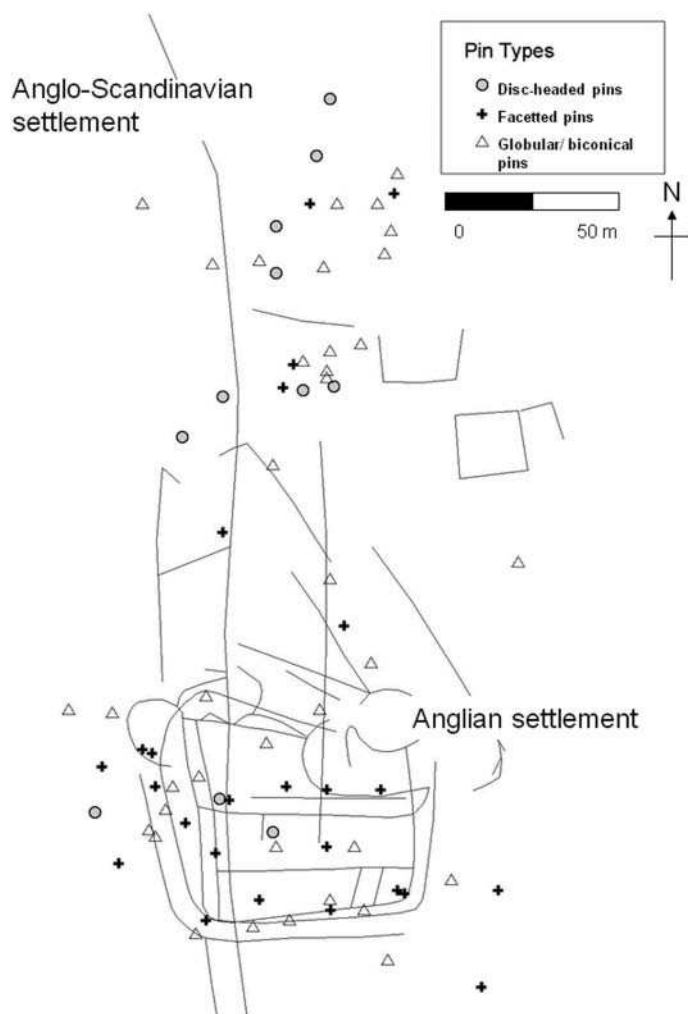


FIG 3
Distribution of pin types
superimposed on crop mark
plot at Cottam B. © D Haldenby
and J D Richards.

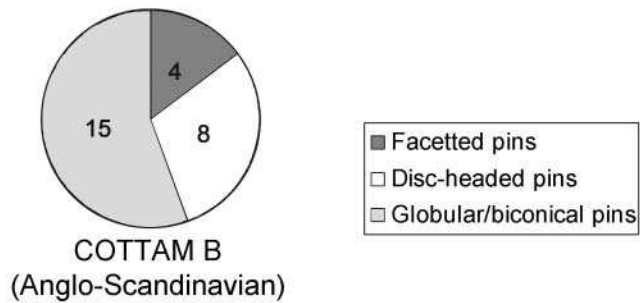
cuboid heads where often the short edges are chamfered and not the corners, creating nine faces. The majority of examples have ring-and-dot decoration, which in the case of the cuboid types is commonly a single ringed dot in each of the four vertical faces, although in some larger examples all faces can contain one or more ringed dots. The two enlarged faces on the mallet-headed forms usually display several ringed dots and even the narrow faces can contain a single ringed dot.

Other middle Anglo-Saxon and late-Saxon pin forms comprise pins with: globular heads (sometimes with flattened tops); biconical heads (often with flattened circumferences and/or tops) and disc-headed types (Fig 2). The last are usually decorated with several ringed dots on one face only (although both can be decorated); the other two types only occasionally have ringed dot decoration, and it is almost always absent with the conical forms.

PIN-TYPE DISTRIBUTION AT COTTAM B

The results that emerge from applying this classification to the Cottam B pins demonstrate that the facetted pins are a middle Anglo-Saxon form that goes out of

ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN:



MIDDLE ANGLO-SAXON / ANGLIAN:

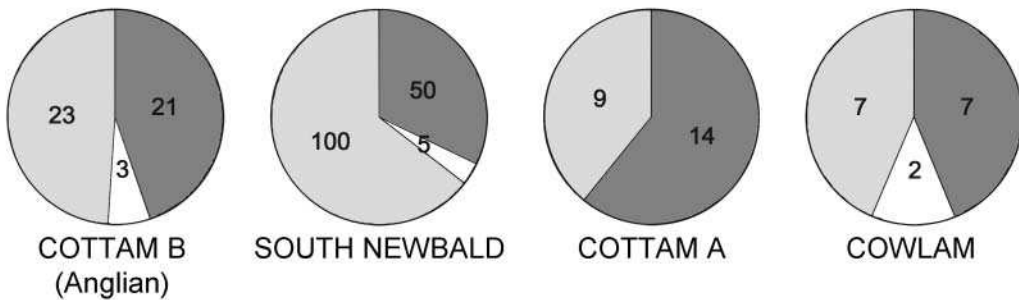


FIG 4

Proportions of pin types at Cottam B and other sites. © *D Haldenby and J D Richards.*

fashion in the 10th century. Over the area of the Anglian site the facetted pins comprise 45% of all simple copper-alloy pins, whereas the figure drops to 15% over the area of Anglo-Scandinavian settlement (Fig 3).¹³ The proportion of facetted pins at Cottam B can also be compared with that at other middle Anglo-Saxon sites in the East Riding: South Newbald,¹⁴ Cottam A and Cowlam.¹⁵ Each is comparable to Cottam B in several important respects, including being the focus of metal-detector survey, fully accessible for study, and plough-damaged, generally with total destruction of the occupation surfaces. In each case facetted pins are similarly well represented (Fig 4). Our study therefore provides useful confirmation of Bu'lock's previous observation about the scarcity of facetted pins on Viking-Age sites.¹⁶

In contrast, although smaller numbers are involved, there is a visible upsurge in the popularity of disc-headed pins during the Anglo-Scandinavian phase at Cottam B, whereas this type is relatively scarce during the Anglian phase, as well as on other middle Anglo-Saxon sites in the region (Fig 4).

The pattern of use of globular and biconical pins does not appear to have varied between the two Cottam B settlements, although a later date may be suggested for the

¹³ In calculating the figures used in Figs 3 and 4, iron pins and chip-carved disc-headed pins (which are known to be of 8th-century date) have been excluded. Pins 61 and 163 have also been excluded as they are unusual forms; the former is uncharacteristically large and thin; the latter is heavily worn and could be an 8th-century form. All examples of chip-carved disc-headed pins at Cottam B were found within the Anglian area.

¹⁴ Leahy 2000 and Haldenby archive.

¹⁵ Richards et al in prep.

¹⁶ Bu'lock 1960.

variety of globular head that has rising curved sides, since all three examples were found in the Anglo-Scandinavian area.

CONCLUSION

The relocation of the Anglo-Scandinavian settlement at Cottam B ensured that its artefactual remains were not superimposed on or mixed with the earlier Anglian occupation debris. When combined with the large numbers of pins and strap ends recovered, this provides a rare opportunity to gain insights into changes in dress accoutrements in middle Anglo-Saxon and late-Saxon England. The strongest indications to emerge are that geometric forms of strap ends went out of fashion during the middle Anglo-Saxon period. Anglo-Scandinavian tastes also saw the simple faceted pin giving way to other forms, not least the simpler but more visible disc-headed pin. The national distribution of the different pin types has been studied as part of the VASLE project, and the chronological difference that has emerged at Cottam and other East Riding sites may be worthy of further examination at other sites to test if the same pattern emerges.¹⁷

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¹⁷ VASLE was a three-year research project funded by the AHRC using portable antiquities to examine Viking and Anglo-Saxon Landscape and Economy, <www.york.ac.uk/depts/arch/vasle> [last modified 18 December 2006]; Richards et al 2009 publishes national distribution maps.

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A CARVED MEDIEVAL CHESS KING FOUND ON THE ISLAND OF HITRA, NEAR TRONDHEIM, NORWAY

The possibility that the Lewis chess pieces found in western Scotland may have been produced in Norway, and more specifically in the cathedral city of Trondheim (formerly Nidaros), has been mooted previously, and is discussed elsewhere in the present volume.²⁰ The evidence for this, while circumstantial, is nonetheless compelling: the style of ornamentation employed on the pieces is directly comparable to that used in connection with Norwegian — and particularly mid-Norwegian — Romanesque carving traditions, in wood, stone and skeletal materials; a fragment of a queen piece resembling the Lewis queens was found during excavations in a Trondheim church; and Trondheim was from the mid-12th century onwards the seat of the archbishopric of Nidaros, the administrative centre of a geographically vast archiepiscopal province that included the Shetland Islands and Greenland, the latter paying taxes to the archbishopric in the form of walrus ivory — the raw material from which most of the Lewis pieces are carved.²¹ Assuming that the Lewis pieces are indeed the products of a late 12th- or early 13th-century Norwegian artistic milieu, Trondheim, the country's royal and ecclesiastical power centre at the time, offers an eminently appropriate context for the manufacture of these emblematic high-status ivory carvings.²²

In the absence of the archaeological identification of the production workshop, this association with Trondheim naturally remains conjectural. In the meantime, however, occasional finds emerge that supplement our perception of the cultural context in which the Lewis pieces were conceived and produced, as well as the prevailing practices and mentalities within the spheres of medieval art and leisure, and contemporary perceptions and representations of hierarchy and power. One such artefact is a carved chess piece discovered by chance in the year 2000 on Hitra, an island some 80 km west of Trondheim (Fig 5), by a person taking a stroll at Bekkvika on the island's southern shore. Battered and worn, it lay alone and almost undetectable among the beach pebbles. The little figure (Fig 6) immediately aroused local interest, and was eventually sent to Trondheim Museum. Here art historian Håkon Andersen, cathedral archaeologist Øystein Ekroll and I identified it as a chess king, enthroned and clothed in royal garb,

²⁰ See Taylor 1986; McLees and Ekroll 1990; Stratford 1997; Robinson 2004; and Caldwell et al 2009 (this volume).

²¹ McLees and Ekroll 1990.

²² The archbishop constructed a monumental stone-built palace beside Nidaros Cathedral during the late 12th century. Recent excavations demonstrate that the late 15th-/early 16th-century archbishopric employed a number of specialist craftsmen who plied their respective trades in purpose-built workshops within the palace precinct (Nordeide 2000 and Saunders 2002). These included a series of mint workshops, an armoury and a possible cobbler's workshop. However, this may reflect special circumstances in the years leading up to the Reformation, and it is uncertain whether a similarly close association of artisans and patron existed during the preceding centuries.