

The Staffordshire Hoard

Discovery and Initial Assessment

The Recovery of the Material¹

The Staffordshire hoard was found on the 5-10 of July, 2009 by Mr Terry Herbert while metal detecting on arable land at a site in Staffordshire. Mr Herbert contacted Duncan Slarke, the Portable Antiquities Scheme's Finds Liaison Officer for Staffordshire and the West Midlands, who visited the finder at his home and prepared an initial list of 244 bags of finds which were then taken to Birmingham Museum and HM Coroner was informed. Duncan Slarke also contacted the relevant archaeological authorities including the Staffordshire Historic Environment Record, the Potteries Museum, Stoke on Trent, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, and the Portable Antiquities & Treasure Department at the British Museum. A meeting was held in Birmingham on 21st of July at which it was agreed that the controlled recovery of the remaining objects of the hoard and an archaeological investigation of the findspot was a priority. It was also agreed that one of the Portable Antiquities Scheme's National Advisors, Dr Kevin Leahy, should compile the hand list of finds which forms the basis of this report.

On the 22nd of July archaeologists from Staffordshire County Council visited the site in the company of Duncan Slarke and Mr Herbert. A further 24 objects were recovered and their positions plotted on the following day. With the kind permission of the landowner and the active co-operation of Mr Herbert and funding from English Heritage and Staffordshire County Council an excavation was undertaken by a small team from Birmingham Archaeology between 24th of July and the 21st of August. This work resulted in the discovery of a further 571 bagged finds. Subsequent to the excavation Mr Herbert has continued to monitor the site and has found further material, albeit on a greatly reduced scale.

The National Advisor, has, with the assistance of his wife, completed the hand list as a Microsoft Access database which allows us to begin to see something of the size and nature of the find. Staff at Birmingham Museum have boxed the finds in conservation grade materials.

Small blocks of earth

Mr Herbert recovered 56 small blocks of earth or clay which gave a response to the metal detector and these vary in weight between 99g and 1g. An x-ray examination of these proved useful and gave some indication of what they contain. Working from x-ray images presents some problems but it may be said that most of the fragments present within the earth differ little from the other material found on the site. There is a lot of crumpled sheet metal, some of which could be identified as sword hilt plates, rivets from hilts can also be seen. Fragments of reeded strip were present and it could be seen that some of the other fragments were decorated with filigree. At least one object is decorated with cloisonné garnets. One or more discs with toothed edges were observed which, so far as is known, have not been amongst the other material from the site. The state of the material is curious; although the fragments are crumpled they remain discrete suggesting they may have been loosely packed in a bag, which decomposed and was in-filled with earth, but further work is needed to clarify this.

¹ This Report is the work of Kevin Leahy, who would like to thank Leslie Webster, Michelle Brown and Elisabeth Okasha for their comments.

Finds from the site

Many of the bags were found to contain multiple finds most of which required a unique number. The hand list therefore now contains 1381 records (37 of which are not part of the hoard) which can be attributed as follows:

Mr Herbert (original discovery and subsequent finds)	537 items
Staffordshire County Council	37 items
Birmingham Archaeology	807 items
(Individual finds can all be attributed using the hand list/database)	

The metallic composition of the finds

Most of the material recovered was found to be of gold or silver alloys, there being 655 items of gold with a total mass (including, at this stage, much earth) of around five kilograms (11 lb). There were 545 pieces of silver with a mass of around 1.3 kilograms (2.8 lb). Ninety items were found that appear to be made from copper alloy although difficulties were experienced in distinguishing between copper alloys and base silver. This problem will be resolved by the use of XRF analysis but, so far as the inquest is concerned, the silver content is immaterial as objects made from base alloys which formed part of the original deposit are considered to be Treasure. Mr Herbert also recovered small blocks of earth which gave a response on his metal detector. X-ray examination has shown these to contain a large number of fragments of gold and silver together with some objects.

Alloys used

XRF (x-ray fluorescence) analysis has been carried out at the Birmingham Museum on a number of objects from the deposit. This work confirmed the visual identification of the alloys as gold and silver. The analysis of some of the more significant items is as follows:

Item no.	Description	Location of sample	Au	Ag	Cu
652 (T45)	Large zoomorphic mount	Front	88.9	6.9	4.7
652 (T45)	Large zoomorphic mount	Reverse	87.3	8.1	4.7
270 (T185)	Garnet inlaid pointed oval mount	Reverse (dirty)	75.7	20.4	2.1
550 (T27)	Strip with inscription	Front	71.3	24.3	3.1
655 (T1)	Large gold cross, folded	Front	76.7	20.7	2.1
656 (T1)	Large gold setting	Reverse	70.1	27.2	3.1
453 (T221)	?Cheek-piece	Reverse	61.3	36.8	3.4
	?Cheek-piece	Reverse (dark patch)	57.9	39.6	3.6

452 (T232)	Pommel with garnet inlay on the sides	Top	78.9	18.3	3.1
674 (T76)	Pommel with garnet inlay on the sides	Top	71.1	25.4	3.8

Non-Treasure finds

37 items recovered were found on examination either to be of modern date or undiagnostic and these are not considered to be part of the hoard. They are listed in Appendix 3 below. None of the iron objects found could be considered to be anything other than recent (nineteenth or twentieth century). The pottery consisted of tin glazed earthen wares and salt glazed stone wares of similar date. All of the glass was also recent. A silver plate and chain (Number 890 on the hand list) bore an inscription showing it to be of twentieth century date. Other than the hoard and the recent fragments there was little else on the site, Roman material, both pottery and metalwork were absent as was High, and Post Medieval material suggesting that the field only came into cultivation in recent times. The small size of the fragments of recent pottery and glass suggests that they were spread on the field with farmyard manure.

The condition of the finds

Most of the objects had been damaged prior to deposition, the gold had been bent, twisted and sometimes broken. Silver, being less malleable, broke before bending and was more highly fragmented. While there was much damage, most of this appears to reflect, not deliberate destruction, but the detachment of fitting from their original settings and the compaction of larger pieces to fit into a small space. Many items are fragile and real malice would have destroyed them. It appears from their condition that the larger gold items had only entered the plough soil recently.

Of the material found, 864 (62.6%) items had a mass of less than 3 grams and 507 (36.6%) had a mass of less than 1 gram.

The content of the hoard (for summary see Appendix 1)

Many of the types of object found in the Staffordshire hoard are most unusual, (although we must be careful about using this word in the context of something which is unique). Most fittings come from the hilts of swords; together with what may be fragments from helmets, two, possibly three, Christian crosses and many objects which have not yet been identified. Hilt fittings are represented by 84 pommel caps, including fragments, some of which may have come off the same cap. Of the pommel caps, 68 are gold, 11 are silver and 5 are copper alloy or base silver. It is likely that some of the pommels were used on a 'seax', a short single edged sword/knife. In addition to the caps there are 135 sword hilt plate fragments (106 gold, 24 silver and 5 copper alloy) which, as they were made from thin sheet metal, are often incomplete. A sword hilt would have used a set of four plates. Some of the hilt plates were decorated with cabochon garnets. There are 71 hilt collars, (66 gold, 2 silver and 3 copper alloy) which would have fitted around the grips of a sword. Sword pyramids, fittings which are likely to have been used as toggles, were represented by ten finds, all gold but for one silver example. 427 undecorated fragments were found, consisting, in the main, of plate fragments or pieces of sheet metal. Of the plain pieces of silver 62 had been gilded.

While the sword fittings are readily recognised some caution is needed in the identification of helmet parts and it must be recognised that, in the present state of knowledge, there are few fragments that can be unequivocally described as helmet fittings, although the large fragment cat. 453 is likely to be the side piece for a helmet. Some of the 'C' sectioned silver edging and reeded strips might be interpreted as fittings from helmets. Similar elements, in copper alloy were identified on the Sutton Hoo helmet (Oddy, Bimson and Werner, 1978, 226-7) and seen more clearly on a helmet from Valsgärde 7 (Bruce-Mitford, 1978, 212-3, Figs 159-60). It is possible that the silver panels, now highly fragmented and bearing interlaced animals, may also have been used on helmets, although the design occurs on sword hilts. The silver-gilt animal-head, (Find Number 678) may have been the terminal of a helmet crest.

The only items that are clearly non-martial are the two (possibly three) crosses (Find Numbers 655, 820, 920) and an inscription on a strip of gold (550). One of these, a pendant cross, is likely to have been designed for wear by an individual, its form resembles that of the lost Thurnham cross from near Maidstone, Kent, and the cross buried with St Cuthbert (obit AD 687) (Bruce-Mitford 1974, 281-302). Unlike the Cuthbert cross the Staffordshire find is decorated with filigree, not cloisonné garnets. It has been broken, one arm now being detached. The other gold cross is larger, suited for use as an altar or processional cross. It is folded but other than the loss of the settings used to decorate it (some of which, containing glass or gems are present, but detached) it appears complete. There is another possible cross amongst the finds but it is impossible, at present, to claim that it is Christian, rather than simply a cross-shaped mount.

A strip of gold bears (cat. 550), on each of its two faces, a Latin inscription with the following reading:

'surge d[omi]ne [et] dissepentur² inimici tui et fugent³ qui oderunt te a facie tua' ('rise up, o Lord, and may thy enemies be scattered and those who hate thee be driven from thy face'). This is from the Vulgate version of Numbers 10.35 and is the subject of a separate report by Prof. Elisabeth Okasha of the University of Cork, which is included as an appendix to this report.

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A large and impressive element of the hoard are a number of mounts of gold inlaid with extremely delicate and fine garnet cloisonné. It has not yet proved possible to identify these remarkable objects with certainty but they may represent scabbard fittings. Equally enigmatic are two small gold snakes, which, again, are without parallel. As work progresses on this material it is hoped to resolve its cultural links and suggest where its components were made; they could include products of Kent or East Anglia. Research might allow the recognition of a Mercian workshop.

Perhaps more striking than what the hoard contains is what was not found. There are no feminine dress fittings such as brooches and pendants which are, elsewhere, the gold objects most commonly found in Anglo-Saxon contexts (see Webster and Backhouse 1991, 26-29; 30-55). While the hoard contains large numbers of sword fittings there are no military strap fittings or, more particularly, the triangular three rivet gold buckles that are the most common gold finds in the graves of males (Speake, 1980, Pl. 6-8). The finds are almost exclusively martial and masculine in nature and show every sign of being carefully selected.

² This should be 'dissipentur'.

³ This should be 'fugiant'.

The date of the deposit

While much of the decorative detail on these objects remains obscured by earth it seems on present evidence that the contents of the hoard range from the later sixth to the early eighth centuries AD. There are no objects decorated in Salin's Style I, which was current in the fifth-sixth centuries and nothing needs to be later than the early eighth century. The swords and sword fittings appear, on first examination, to belong to types which Menghin (1982) places in this period. Cloisonné garnet work, in which the precious stones are set in gold-walled cells, appears on 149 objects. In most cases the garnets are set in geometric designs, the stones being used in profusion to give a carpet like effect but on 19 objects the cells form zoomorphic designs, sometimes set against blank 'lidded' cells. Some cells appear empty but without cleaning it is unclear if this is actually the case or if the stones have collapsed into the cells. Much use was also made of filigree with interlace, scrolled and linear filigree being employed on 360 objects. In some cases the filigree forms zoomorphic motifs but these are at present difficult to recognise beneath the earth covering.

Twenty-seven of the objects are decorated in Salin's Style II, which is characterised by animals with interlaced bodies and distinctive jaws and eye settings (Speake, 1980). It is likely that more Style II decoration will be found when the filigree is cleaned. In England this style is characteristic of the late sixth-seventh centuries. There appear to have been at least two traditions of decoration; East Anglian and Kentish (Høilund Nielsen 1999, 185 – 202), though the situation is probably more complex; it will be very interesting to see what new insights the Staffordshire Hoard offers here.

Potentially the latest object from the site is the inscription (cat. 550: see above). Michelle Brown, Professor of Medieval Manuscript Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, commented:

"The style of lettering inclines me towards an earlier date - 7th or early eighth, rather than the late 8th-9th century core of the Tiberius group mss from this locale. This is suggested by a high preponderance of uncial letter forms (N, E, S) and half-uncial 'oc' a, mixed with minuscules (g, d), plus the open wedges to heads of minims (d, i - of new roman cursive derivation, but probably the result of the scratched medium, perhaps implying someone who was used to drafting on wax tablets)."

On the other hand, Professor Okasha (whose full report is published below) concluded:

"It is not easy to date any Anglo-Saxon inscribed text on the basis of the script alone. Nevertheless, some indications can be suggestive. The following features of the script used suggest to me a date in the 8th or the 9th century:

- the use of insular majuscule
- the considerable use of large open serifs
- the similarity of the script to the four inscribed texts mentioned, all of which fall within this date-range
- the particular similarity with the script of the independently dated Flixborough II (the lead plate).

To this may be added the fact that niello work in general is typical of the 8th to the 9th century (Webster and Backhouse 1991, 220) as is, in particular, niello used in inscribed texts."

It therefore seems that a date in the early 8th century might be most likely for this inscription.

Context of deposition

The discovery of this hoard in Staffordshire should cause no surprise; it is the heartland of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia which was militarily aggressive and expansionist during the seventh and eighth centuries under kings Penda (633 – 655), Wulfhere (658 -675), Aethelred (675 – 704), Coenred (704-19), Ceolred (709-716) or Aethelbald (716-757). This material could have been collected by any of these men during their wars with Northumbria and East Anglia or indeed, by someone whose name is lost to history.

The deposit is 'unbalanced', consisting, in the main, of fittings from swords. Other, related objects, such as baldric fittings and large triangular buckles are absent, as are feminine dress fittings. Some fragments may represent helmet fragments but more work needs to be done on them. At present the function of the garnet covered strips is unknown. There is nothing that might have come from a 'Celtic context' such as enamel work, with the possible exception of the millefiori on sword pyramid no. 1166.

The Staffordshire find might be interpreted as a 'trophy hoard' in the original sense of the word: material collected from vanquished enemies, the sword blades perhaps re-used but stripped of their valuable fittings. It may represent the results of a single battle, or the product of a long military career. Further study of the finds may give some insights into this.

This mass of material is unlikely to have come from a grave as the objects that we might expect to see in a grave of this period are absent, nor is there any trace of a grave or mound. This could be some kind of ritual deposit; the Portable Antiquities Scheme has, over the last ten years, recorded nine pommels and other sword fittings, possibly stripped from their blades and apparently abandoned. This might represent a similar practice, but on a much smaller scale. Perhaps the most likely reason for the deposition of the hoard is the most prosaic one: that it does represent a trophy collection, hidden in the face of a perceived, but real, threat, which prevented the owner from returning to recover it.

It is the aim of the Portable Antiquities Scheme to make this material available, on line, as quickly as possible. Once its future has been decided, work can begin on the cleaning of the finds and making images and details available through our website.

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National Advisor, Early Medieval Metalwork, Portable Antiquities Scheme

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Appendix

Report on inscription

Professor Elisabeth Okasha, University of Cork

Description⁴

The inscribed strip is made of gold alloy. It is now folded over in half on itself. When straight it would have measured 179 mm in length, 15.8 mm in width and 2.1 mm in thickness. On the outer side of the strip is a text set in two lines. The decoration at each end of the strip indicates that the text is complete. The letters are formed by incisions which were then filled with niello. On the back of the strip are some marks which might, or might not, be letter forms. (Until I can examine the actual strip, I am unsure about these).

There are at least two holes which were presumably used for fastening the strip on to some larger object. This might have been a shield or other weapon, or perhaps a sword-belt, or possibly some ecclesiastical object. Parallels might include, for example, a silver strip from the ninth-century Trewhiddle hoard (Webster and Backhouse 1991, 271-2, no. 246(f)), or strips forming parts of decorated sword hilts (Webster and Backhouse 1991, 276-7). There seems no reason to suppose that the inscribed strip necessarily came from a helmet. Few helmets survive from Anglo-Saxon England, and only one is inscribed, which suggests to me that this is less likely than one of the other possibilities.

Transliteration

The letters are transliterated as capitals with deliberate spaces in the text retained. An underlined letter indicates that the letter, though damaged, is legible. An underlined letter inside square brackets indicates that the damage renders the reading of the letter uncertain. A dot inside square brackets indicates that one letter is lost. A letter inside square brackets but with no underlining indicates that the letter is of unusual form. In addition, ‘.’ indicates a deliberate single dot in the text, ‘/’ indicates a ligature, and ‘//’ indicates the fold in the strip.

Text

The text on the outer side reads:

[.] I R G E : D N E : D I S E P E N T U // [.] F I N I M I C I T U I [.] E / T

[.] U G E N T Q U I O D E R U N // T T E A F A C I E T [U] A

Line 1: the first letter, now lost, might, but need not, have read S. It is followed by I, not U. The lost letter after the fold could alternatively have been the end of the preceding U. It is followed by F, presumably an error for R.

Line 2: the first letter, now lost, might, but need not, have read F. The penultimate letter, inside square brackets, is probably U but of an unusual shape, resembling U/I.

There are three deliberate dots in the text, one each around the word DNE (*domine*) and a less certain one preceding the ligature E/T. These could represent inconsistent use of dots to indicate word separation (relatively common in Anglo-Saxon inscribed texts) and/or could be used to highlight the *nomen sacrum*. The deliberate space in the text, preceding the letter Q, may indicate

⁴ Professor Okasha would like to note that this report has been written on the basis of photographs only.

word separation or may have been an attempt to fit the remaining letters into the space available. The ligature E/T is in the form of the usual manuscript abbreviation for *et*.

Divided into words, with abbreviations expanded and likely letters assumed, the text can be read:
[.]irge domine disepentu[r] inimici tui et [f]ugent qui oderunt te a facie t[ua]

Source of text

The inscribed text is clearly a rendering of the well-known Vulgate text, appearing in this form in Numbers 10, 35:

cumque elevaretur arca dicebat Moses surge Domine et dissipentur inimici tui et fugiant qui oderunt te a facie tua ‘When he had lifted up the ark, Moses said “Rise up, Lord, and may your enemies be dispersed and those who hate you be driven from your face”’.

Differences appearing in the inscribed text are:

- [.]irge, probably [s]irge, for *surge*
- the omission of *et* following *domine*
- *disepentu[r]*, where the final letter clearly reads *f*, for *dissipentur*
- [f]ugent for *fugiant*

The *f* for *r* in *dissipentur*, the spelling [s]irge for *surge*, and the omission of *et* are most likely to be errors made by the engraver in copying his/her exemplum. The other differences could have a similar cause, but there are frequent examples of such non-classical spellings in medieval Latin.

Although it is possible that the composer of the exemplum had the text from Numbers in mind, it is more likely that the version from the Psalms would be better known to him/her as the Psalms were chanted daily throughout the year in the monastic liturgy. This text appears in Psalm 67, 2 as:

exurgat Deus et dissipentur inimici eius et fugiant qui oderunt eum a facie eius

The differences occur in the first two words and also in the use of the plural, not the singular, of the second person pronouns (you, etc).

This text, in one or other form, was fairly frequently quoted in Medieval Latin documents: an on-line search of the *Patrologia Latina* produced ten exact quotations. Interestingly, the text was also used in the liturgy for the consecration of churches.

Script

The script used is insular majuscule and, as is common with this script, includes the odd capital form, for example some (but not all) of the forms of N, and all the instances of R. This inconsistency in letter form is entirely usual in Anglo-Saxon inscriptions, whatever script is used, and can also be seen here in some letters E being high, some not, and in two different forms of F. The G used is the insular minuscule form and the A is the half uncial. There is inconsistency in the use of word separation, which again is entirely usual in inscribed texts of all scripts and all dates within the period.

What is quite unusual is the considerable use of large open serifs on some letters. These occur alongside ordinary serifs and stem-thickening. For example, in the word *qui*, the Q has a large open serif, the lower leg of the U has an ordinary serif, and the I has a thickened stem. Nevertheless, the use is not consistent. For example, five instances of the letter I contain these large open serifs while three do not; all three examples of D contain them; of the five instances of N, two use them two do not, and one is uncertain due to the fold in the strip. The fact that these open serifs are not used consistently suggests to me that they are less a function of the medium used than an artistic flourish on the part of the inscriber. Large open serifs of this sort do occur sporadically elsewhere, for example on the stones 188 Coldingham, probably dating from the 8th or the 9th century and 24 Carlisle II, which is probably 8th century in date (see Okasha 1992). However, their frequent use in the text under discussion is remarkable.

Anglo-Saxon inscriptions using insular majuscule are not very frequent in occurrence: possibly some 10% of the total number of inscribed texts. Of these, five texts can be isolated where the script used resembles fairly closely that of the inscribed strip. They are: 3 Ardwall, 30 Dewsbury I, 145 Yarm, 193 Flixborough II and 225 Kirkdale II. (The running numbers refer to the citation and illustration of the texts in Okasha 1971, 1983, 1992, 2004).

All these inscribed texts date from the 8th to the 9th century, as do the majority of insular majuscule texts. The first three noted above are on stone, the last two on lead objects. The Yarm, Flixborough and Kirkdale letter-forms all contain at least some large serifs, although not of the same open shape as those on the inscribed strip. All also contain half uncial A, capital R and have inconsistency of letter-form. In general terms, the closest parallel in term of script is the lead plate from Flixborough; in addition to the features already noted, the Flixborough text uses insular minuscule G as well as both high and low forms of E. The Flixborough lead plate dates from the 8th to the 9th century.

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