

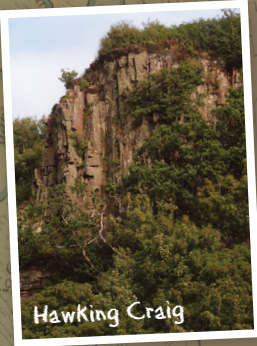


THE HUNTERSTON BROOCH



www.portencrosscastle.org.uk

THE HUNTERSTON BROOCH is a spectacular piece of jewellery. It is large in diameter (12.2cm) and heavy (325 grams). The craftsmen who made it cast it in silver, coated it with gold and added gold designs into recesses on its surface.



Hawking Craig

Two local Hunterston estate workers found the brooch in 1826 at Hawking Craig. The Clan Chief of the Hunters, then took ownership.

Some suggest that a skirmish occurred between the soldiers of King Haakon of Norway and King Alexander III of Scotland just below Hawking Craig. This skirmish took place about the same time as the defeat of the Vikings at the Battle of Largs in 1263. Someone may have hidden the Brooch there at the time.

The Hunter family sold the original Brooch in 1891 to the National Museum of Scotland. The museum now has the Brooch on permanent display. The Hunter family hold a copy of the brooch and another is held in Hunterston Castle, which lies about two miles north of Portencross Castle.



Copy of the original brooch held by the Hunter Family.

People used large brooches (or 'dalks' as they were called) to hold a cloak or plaid in place. Men wore the cloak or plaid over their right shoulder and women wore them over both shoulders, the brooch pinning the cloak at their neck or chest. Early brooches were usually made of a pin and an incomplete circle of metal or other material. The Hunterston brooch is different in design and has a pin and a complete circle. This design suggests that the brooch was made sometime in the 700s AD.



Hunterston Castle

Some suggest that local craftsmen at Dunadd in Kilmartin Glen, Argyll, made the Brooch. That area of Scotland was called Dalriada at that time, and was part of an Irish kingdom. The more important a person was, the more splendid the clothes and jewellery they wore. The size and design of the Hunterston Brooch indicate that it belonged to a chieftain or other important person.



A collection of early brooches showing incomplete circles at the National Museum of Scotland.

Professor George Stephens examined the brooch in detail in 1877. He described it as the finest 'fibula' (brooch) that anyone had ever found in Scotland, and the only Scottish one that had 'runes' inscribed on it. Runes are letters of ancient languages that people used before we adopted our current alphabet.

Much later (1974), Professor Robert Stevenson examined it. He described the artwork of the brooch as typical of Celtic art at the time. Designs on the Brooch use beasts, birds' heads, and snakes with fish tails. These designs represent the living creatures of land, air and sea from the Book of Genesis.



Professor Robert Stevenson employed an artist to capture the detail of each design.



The cross shows a distinctive Christian influence at work.



POSSIBLE LINKS WITH THE AREA AND ST BRIGID

Recent scholars have suggested links between St Brigid (St Bride) and the area around West Kilbride. St Brigid was born around 450AD in Faughart, a town halfway between Belfast and Dublin. Her origins were humble but her reputation as a holy person became widely known as she grew up. The King of Leinster was impressed by her holiness and granted her large areas of land. Brigid set up the monastery of Kildare on these lands.

Brigid made Kildare a well-known house of learning for both men and women. It included schools for arts and crafts. The artwork was aimed at creating decorative Christian manuscripts similar in style to the famous Book of Kells. As Christianity spread, monasteries in other places produced such books, for example the Lindisfarne Gospels. Much of the design work in these books is mirrored in the designs found on the Hunterston Brooch.

From Ireland, Brigid's followers ('servants of Brigid') spread their Christian gospel to 'cells' across parts of Scotland. You can identify these cells today through their names, for example, West Kilbride, Kilwinning, Kilbirnie, and Kilmarnock. At the same time, her followers continued to develop their skills as goldsmiths and silversmiths and passed these skills to others. Excavations at Dunnad in Argyll have unearthed an assortment of casting moulds and tools used to produce designs similar to those on the Hunterston Brooch.

THE FRONT OF THE HUNTERSTON BROOCH

The craftsmen who cast the main frame of the Brooch in silver 'fire gilded' it to give it the appearance of being made of solid gold. Gilding also stopped the silver from tarnishing. They gilded metal such as silver by making a paste from gold powder and mercury and spreading this on the surface of the piece of jewellery. When they heated it in a fire, the mercury evaporated to leave a thin layer of pure gold. The gilding on the Hunterston Brooch is largely worn off.



gold frame riveted into sockets on the brooch

The gold 'filigree' and 'granulation' work on the Hunterston Brooch is truly amazing. For the filigree, craftsmen used fine wire which they pleated, made into figures of eight, or left plain. For the granulation, they fused granules of gold onto the

wire designs. The craftsmen soldered their finished designs into gold frames and then riveted the frames into sockets on the silver body of the brooch. In order to control such delicate work, a craftsman needed a level of skill that easily equals that of any modern-day jeweller. Granulation was developed by the Etruscans who flourished in Italy around the 700s – 400s BC. Many thought that their intricate skills had been lost, but archeological finds at Pompeii and Herculaneum show that the skills were used very widely. The Hunterston Brooch shows that such fine skills were being used at the very edges of Europe during what people call the 'Dark Ages'.

The craftsmen who made the Hunterston Brooch show influences from the Irish, Scottish and Anglo-Saxons.

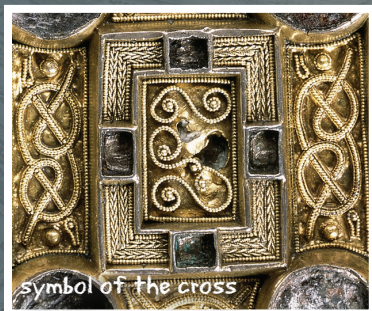
keystone shape
pin head



amber
cabochon
style gems

RELIGIOUS LINKS

The design of the Brooch has obvious Christian influences. The symbol of the Cross is the focal point of the lower part of the brooch. The cross is large and the centre has another applied pattern in it. This practice was typical where there was no crucified figure of Christ. The living creatures are said to signify 'Creation'. The patterns above and below the cross are eagles heads. These are symbols of protection.



symbol of the cross

AMBER GEMS

The Hunterston Brooch originally had fourteen domed and polished amber gems. As a result, they stood out from the silver and gold collars that held them in place. The amber has worn away over time and only the stumps are left. Some settings are completely empty.

Amber is the fossilised remains of tree resin. The amber probably would have come to Scotland on trading routes from the area around the Baltic Sea in Northern Europe. People still mine for amber there today.

The keystone shape pin head shows the level of ornamental detail on the brooch. Even the sharp end of the pin and the edge of the Brooch are highly decorative.



empty settings



detailed design on the brooch edge

The four empty settings on the arms of the cross at the lower part of the brooch suggest that they contained other gems such as garnet or imitations made of red glass, which was common practice at the time. However, there is no official record of such gems ever being part of the brooch.



detailed design on the end of the pin

THE BACK OF THE HUNTERSTON BROOCH

RUNIC INSCRIPTIONS

You can see 'runes' inscribed on the top left and top right of the rear of the Brooch. Translating the words is not straightforward. As the Vikings conquered and settled the west coast of Britain, they brought with them their own local 'dialects'. Examples of these were Manx-Norse and Celtic-Norse. Later, these dialects were modified by time and local influence. Translation of the characters and words has varied from first attempts to more recent work, which has benefited from more extensive research and scholarship.

Professor Stephens translated the runes on the top left of the Brooch as **'MALBRITHA A TALK THOELR I LARI'**, which he said meant, **'Malbritha owns this brooch'**. Malbritha was a man's name and **'dalk'** means a brooch. Viking runes had no **'D'**, and the **'T'** stood for both sounds. So **'TOALK'** is likely to mean **'brooch'**. **'THYRL'** he suggested was the rank or position of the owner, for example, a priest, lawman, orator or poet. **'I LARI'** was meant to be the owner's home address, but no such place has ever been found.



Interpretation
of the older
inscription



runes to the left of the rear of the brooch



runes



Interpretation
of the later
inscription

To the top right of the Brooch, someone inscribed runes at a later date. They read, 'TOALK A OLFRITI'. Scholars have translated this inscription as, 'This brooch belongs to Olfriti'. Olfriti is a woman's name.

In the space that was left after that inscription, there are other markings that look like runes. These markings have puzzled experts. People now think that they are simply decorative in-filling to stop any further runes being added. The earliest runes are likely to have been inscribed on the brooch in the 900s AD. The Olfriti inscriptions are likely to have been made around 100 years later.

More recently, scholars have applied a different meaning to the runes. In 2006, Michael Barnes and R.I. Page wrote an academic paper called, *The Scandinavian runic inscriptions of Britain*. In it, they suggest that 'MALBRITHA A TALK' translates as, 'Malbrida á stilk'. Malbrida is a Celtic name meaning 'servant of Brigid'. Thus we come a full circle to the local link with West Kilbride.

About Portencross Castle

Portencross has been inhabited for thousands of years. An archaeological dig found evidence of an Iron Age settlement on Auldhill, just behind Portencross Castle.

Portencross Castle was constructed in three phases starting in 1360. It was the home of a branch of the Boyds. The lands around Portencross were given to the Boyds of Kilmarnock by King Robert I as reward for their help at the Battle of Bannockburn. A number of Royal Charters were signed at the castle and it had close links with King Robert II during that period. For a while during the 1600s, it was occupied by local fishermen. The roof was destroyed in a gale in 1739. By the 20th century, the Adams of Auchenames owned the castle. It became a scheduled ancient monument in 1955.

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Friends of Portencross Castle

FOPC is a recognised Scottish Charity (No. SC028181) dedicated to conserving the castle and providing access to the building.

After initial grant funding in 2007, FOPC now has to raise costs for staff, maintenance, education materials, website and overheads. We remain open with the help of donations, volunteers and by having events and functions at the castle.

All donations welcome.
You can become a Guardian of Portencross Castle – details online.

WWW.PORTENCROSSCASTLE.ORG.UK

Opening times can also be found online at the Portencross Castle website.

