

## SHORTER CONTRIBUTIONS

### A LATE MEDIEVAL JEWELLERY AND COIN HOARD FROM HOLBROOK

*by John Newman*

In the mid-1980s information concerning the discovery of a late Medieval jewellery and coin hoard found around the time of the Second World War in the Lower Holbrook area came to light following the reporting of two silver ring-brooches (HBK 012) to the Suffolk Archaeological Unit. The hoard had been discovered following deep ploughing in the area. The find was not reported to any official department at the time of discovery and the contents were dispersed over an unknown length of time, although some of the coins, at least, were examined by a 'local expert'.

Following the initial reporting of the hoard a concerted effort was made to record more information about the find and, if possible, to trace some of the other objects and coins that were found. An appeal for information was made through the local media and the major auction houses were contacted to see if they had any records relating to large-scale coin finds of the late Medieval period coming on to the market in the late 1940s or 1950s. In addition local enquiries were made around Holbrook parish in the Shotley peninsula. Unfortunately none of these lines of enquiry revealed any new information about the 'Holbrook Hoard'. However the information that is known at present is worthy of note and has prompted the publication of this short paper.

The hoard was apparently found in a lead container folded over at the edges like a 'lead envelope', the recovery of such a container tending to indicate that the hoard was intact at the time of discovery. The two silver ring-brooches noted above were reported to the Suffolk Archaeological Unit by David Fulcher and he was able to give some information about other objects in the hoard, though it is unclear whether this list represents a full inventory of the find.

Apart from the two brooches described below, and illustrated in Fig.44. the other objects included a third silver brooch (apparently another ring-brooch), a silver chain and pendant with an oblong-shaped stone and four silver finger-rings (probably without stone settings). The coinage recovered was made up of an unknown quantity of angels and half-angels of Edward IV and some unrecorded silver coins. The gold coinage gives the most precise date for the deposition of this hoard. Half-angels of Edward IV were only issued during the second period of his reign, between 1471 and 1483, and are likely to have been deposited before *c.*1490 (pers. comm. M. Archibald). If any coins of Henry VII had been present in the group, then it is likely that they would have been noted at the time of discovery by the 'local expert'.

The Holbrook Hoard makes a valuable contribution to the study of the late Medieval period even though the information known about it is incomplete. Very few 'mixed' coin and jewellery hoards are known from this era, the large Fishpool Hoard (Cherry 1973) being the best known example, with a probable deposition date of 1464, while the incomplete Thame Hoard (Cherry 1973) is probably slightly earlier. The former hoard in particular exhibits the great wealth and desire for conspicuous display apparent amongst the higher levels of society in late Medieval England (Platt 1969).

Judging by the two plain silver ring-brooches known to have come from the Holbrook Hoard it would appear that this particular deposit did not contain jewellery of the very highest class. As the exact size of the deposit is unknown it is difficult to judge the status of the owner of this treasure, but it is likely that the Holbrook Hoard represented the accumulated wealth of a local family of some standing.

The two ring-brooches that have been seen (Fig.44) were well worn and probably of some age

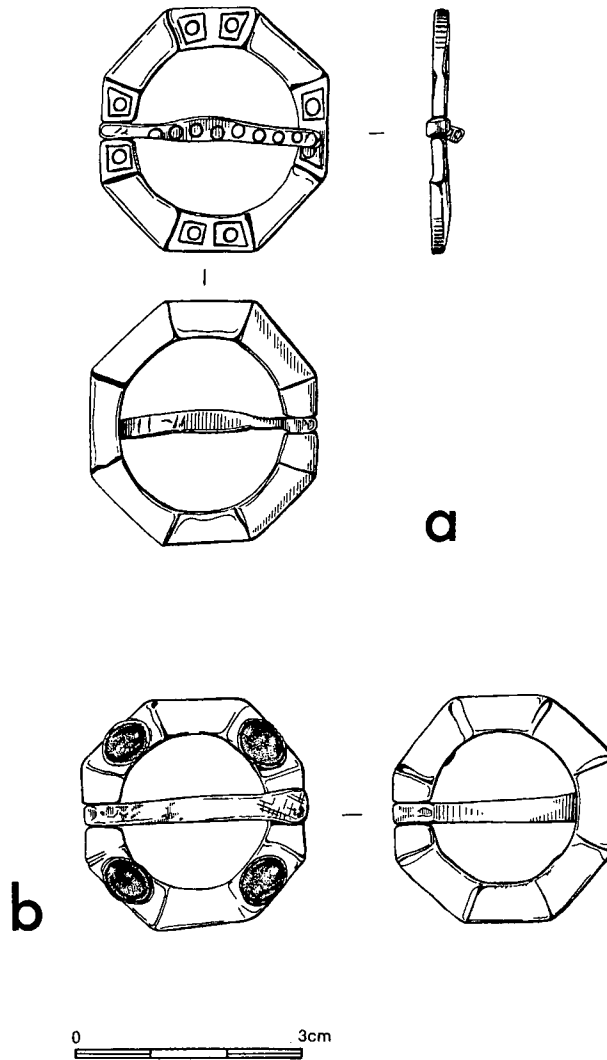


FIG. 44 – Late medieval silver ring-brooches from the Holbrook Hoard.

when deposited. Brooches of this simple type went out of fashion in the 14th century, some three or four generations before the Holbrook Hoard was hidden (Evans 1970, 46). Again it is impossible to come to any definite conclusions about the contents of the Holbrook Hoard, since so little is known about the missing items of jewellery. It is possible that other items of jewellery in the hoard may have been of mid- to late 15th-century date and that the two ring-brooches that have been seen were family heirlooms when the hoard was deposited.

Nevertheless it is of interest to speculate on the events that prompted the hiding of this treasure. One, admittedly straightforward, course of events perhaps involved a prominent local family hiding its portable wealth in the form of jewellery and high value coinage as some perceived threat associated with the turbulent political state of the country in the mid- to late 1480s affected south east Suffolk. The portable wealth that was considered to be worthy of hoarding in this case consisted of items of jewellery, which may well have been family heirlooms,

and contemporary gold and silver coinage. The particular interest of the Holbrook Hoard is that it represents only the third 'mixed' hoard to have been found in England that can be dated to the 15th century and one of what is a very small group of 'mixed' hoards known from the Medieval period in general. It also appears to have been deposited by an owner from a lower level of society than the Fishpool or Thame Hoards and is therefore of value in the admittedly incomplete light it throws on a family of middling rank in late Medieval English society – perhaps a family of county, or local, standing rather than national status as has been argued for the owner of the Fishpool Hoard (Cherry 1973). If nothing else, it shows the universal desire to hide items of portable wealth in times of stress and political upheaval.

To record some information about the Holbrook Hoard is better than to lose all knowledge about it; moreover, it is possible that more information, or even more objects, will come to light at some time in the future. This note should therefore be seen as an interim statement which will hopefully need updating in years to come.

### *The Brooches*

*Brooch 1:* Silver octagonal ring-brooch with slightly bent silver pin, decoration of a circle within a quadrilateral stamped twice on alternate panels, the other panels being plain and slightly recessed. The pin has eight circles stamped along its upper surface. The brooch appears to have been much cleaned and polished. Size: width 30mm, thickness 2mm, pin 29mm long (and slightly flattened). See Fig. 44a.

*Brooch 2:* Silver octagonal ring-brooch with individual red garnets set *en cabochon* in oval cells on alternate panels, other panels plain and slightly recessed. The pin is plain with a slightly spatulate shaped tongue (as this brooch was only seen for a short period of time it is impossible to give more detail of the garnet settings. It should also be noted that this brooch was drawn from photographs, and therefore no section could be drawn). Size: width 30mm, pin 31mm long. See Fig. 44b.

### *Acknowledgements*

The author would like to thank David Fulcher for bringing this find to his attention and to acknowledge the assistance given by the following in the study of the hoard: Glenys Wade for drawing the brooches, Marian Archibald, John Cherry and Sue Margeson for commenting on the find and Sylvia Laverton for her help in trying to follow up local sources in the Holbrook area.

### *References*

- Cherry, J., 1973. 'The Medieval Jewellery from the Fishpool, Nottinghamshire, Hoard', *Archaeologia*, 104, 307–21.  
 Evans, J., 1970. *A History of Jewellery, 1100–1870*. Revised edn, London.  
 Platt, C.P.S., 1969. *Medieval Archaeology in England*. London.