Finds Research Group 700 -1700

DATASHEET 26

WHA'S LIKE US OR JUST THE SAME; SCOTTISH MEDIEVAL SMALL FINDS

ABSTRACTS FROM THE GROUP'S MEETING AT PERTH, 1998: SECOND SELECTION

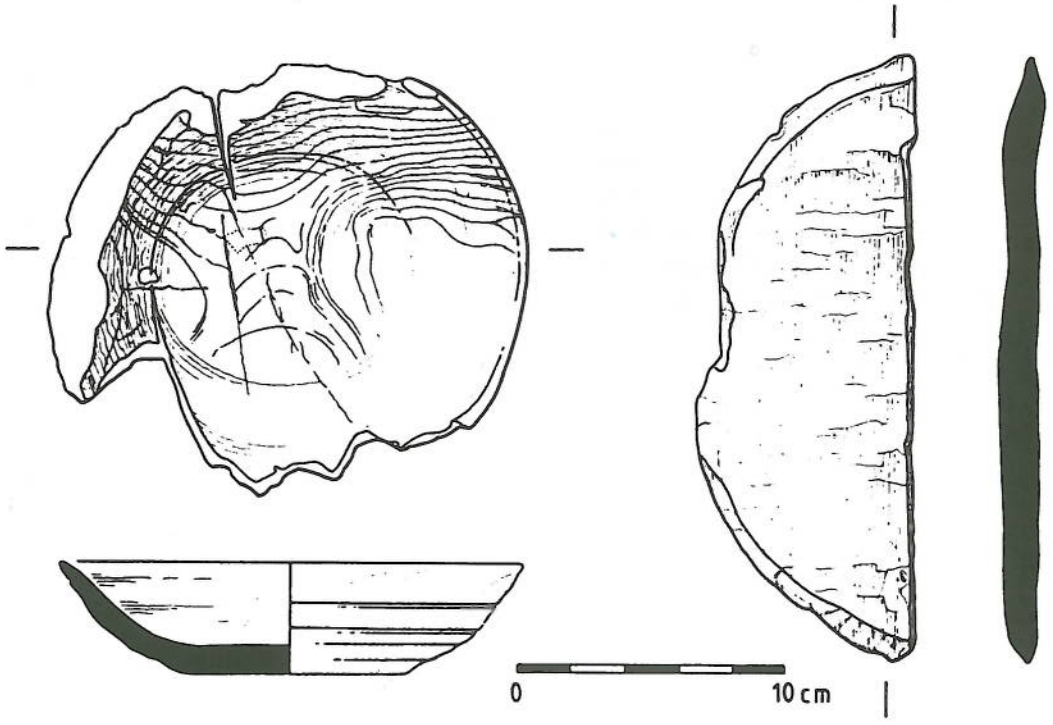

Fig. 1 Medieval wooden artefacts from waterlogged deposits in Perth: a lathe-turned bowl of ash, and a cask head fragment of oak

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SCOTTISH MEDIEVAL URBAN ARTEFACTS

Adrian Cox
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Rescue excavations since the 1970s have greatly contributed to our knowledge of Scottish medieval towns. Especially in Perth and Aberdeen, where deep, anaerobic, waterlogged deposits have been shown to survive, large parts of buildings and other structures have survived, and accompanying them, diverse artefact assemblages, including large quantities of organic materials (Fig. 1).

One of the most important excavations in Scotland to date was that on the High Street in Perth. This site produced evidence of extensive overseas trade links, including trade in luxury items. These trade links are evidence of a thriving mercantile economy in Scottish medieval towns, bolstered by merchants and craftsmen from other parts of Europe. Backland excavations in Perth have produced a very wide range of artefact types, partly coming from rubbish pits and middens, and representing a broad diversity of activities. The artefact evidence indicates a distinctive Scottish medieval material cultures, although the ideas and influences of craftsmen from England, France, Germany and the Low Countries are evident in assemblages.

Much of the illustrative material used in presenting this paper focused upon various crafts and industries. The evidence is especially useful when craft or workshop activities are identified archaeologically, along with some of their products and associated manufacturing debris. Metal-working workshops and leather-working areas have been identified, and evidence has been recovered to show that a bone- and antler-working industry thrived upon the by-products of an animal-based economy. Thanks partly to the excellent conditions for preservation of archaeological materials in Perth and elsewhere, some light has also been shed upon the nature of textile manufacturing and woodworking industries. This great diversity of artefactual evidence deriving from the last twenty or twenty-five years of excavations in Scottish medieval towns has helped us to describe towns and their environments with greater clarity than we can many other kinds of sites.

PAGAN NORSE GRAVES OF SCOTLAND PROJECT

Caroline Patterson

The Pagan Norse Graves of Scotland project, initiated by Professor James Graham-Campbell of University College, London, in conjunction with the National Museums of Scotland, aims to publish the Scottish corpus of pagan Norse graves in detail. Funding has been provided by various bodies including the Leverhulme Foundation, Historic Scotland, the Russell Trust and the British Academy.

Owing to the nature of the surviving material, the project is based primarily on finds. Many of the graves were discovered in the 19th century, so antiquarian research has proven illuminating. Contextual information forms a larger element in accounts of more recent discoveries.

The survey respects the boundaries of modern Scotland, although for obvious reasons comparisons are made as far as Cumbria, the Isle of Man and other areas peripheral to the Irish Sea. Except in these areas, there is a clear distinction between the number and nature of Scottish grave finds and their English counterparts, the latter being remarkable by their near absence.

Fig. 2 One of a pair of tortoise-shell brooches, Perth Museum & Art Gallery. Not to scale.

As the last survey of this material was made by Sigurd Grieg in 1926 (published in Shetelig, H (ed), *Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland, Pt II,* 1940), there is great potential for new research. Many discoveries have been made simply by observation, facilitated by X-ray and metal analysis, for which thanks are due to Katherine Eremin and Paul Wilthew of the National Museums of Scotland. Numerous new graves have come to light since 1926, frequently as a result of coastal erosion.

Unfortunately the project has shed little new light on the finds in Perth Museum's collections. The Gotlandic animal-head brooch, said to be from Bridge of Earn, is of an 11th-century type and therefore post-dates the pagan Norse period in Scotland. As these brooches are otherwise almost exclusive to Gotland and the Baltic, it is most probably a traded antiquarian object. The Watergate sword, without its pommel, is not diagnostically Norse, nor is there any contextual information. Nor is there firm evidence to support Joseph Anderson's suggestion that the pair of P37 oval brooches in the collection came from a grave in Orkney or the Western Isles. However the recent metallurgical analysis of these brooches has raised some interesting questions. Unlike all the other oval brooches from Scotland to be analysed, one of the pair is composed of gunmetal rather than brass, suggesting that it may not have been made in Scandinavia. Although unprovenanced, this brooch may be regarded as having been made within the British Isles – a unique and thrilling find.

WORKING WITH METAL DETECTORISTS IN FIFE

Mike King
Fife Council

The main points of the approach to working with metal detectorists adopted by Fife Council are as follows:

Building good relations with individual metal detectorists and where possible with clubs, making regular visits to view finds. Regular contact helps to educate detectorists in the law, and in best practice. Difficulties encountered often concern detectorists from outside the area. It is important to keep an eye on artefacts appearing in car boot sales or in newspaper advertisements.

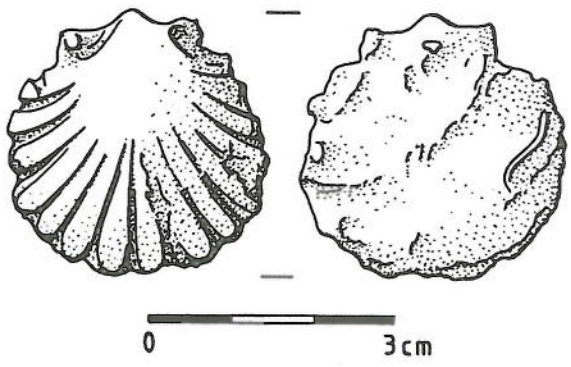

Fig. 3 Scallop-shell badge found near Ardross

Building up collections of material from much-frequented sites, often in close proximity to medieval settlements, as well as stray finds. Groups of finds can be published in the regional journal Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal (TAFAJ). Giving full credit to finders in published reports will promote good relations in the future. Copies of published articles should be sent to finders.

Drawing attention to special types of finds not appearing in urban excavations. Rural finds provide a balance in our view of material culture; examples include religious objects of metal.

Making material available to scholars for publication. Good examples are the studies of Romano-British material from Fife (Hunter, F 'Recent Roman Iron Age Metalwork Finds from Fife and Tayside', in *Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal* 2 (1995), 113-25), and of lead flax bale seals from St Petersburg and Archangel, dated to the 19th century (Sullivan, J *TAFAJ* forthcoming).

Following up promising finds spots with organised field-walking. Over two hundred people are now involved in the Tayside and Fife Archaeological Club. Field-walking events are held in the spring and autumn. Metal detectorists are invited to participate under controlled conditions. All finds are recorded using a 20m grid and become part of a field-walking archive.

Bids made for all Fife finds declared Treasure Trove, for local display. Local people involved in finding things have an interest in keeping them in the locale. There is genuine

interest in seeing items displayed locally, and detectorists receive approval for making finds accessible to the local public.

Key finds receive priority in the Museum Service's conservation plan. Finds made by detectorists are regularly surveyed by the Scottish Museums Council's conservators, and items are conserved for research, and, when the opportunity arises, for display.

Display of finds in local museums and libraries. Special cases have been acquired for small, rotating exhibitions of recent local discoveries, for example at St Monans Library. Loans have been made to local museums, for example to the Crail Museum. There are displays of material in Fife County Council museums, including of finds from Ballinbreich Castle and Lindores Abbey in the Laing Museum, Newburgh.

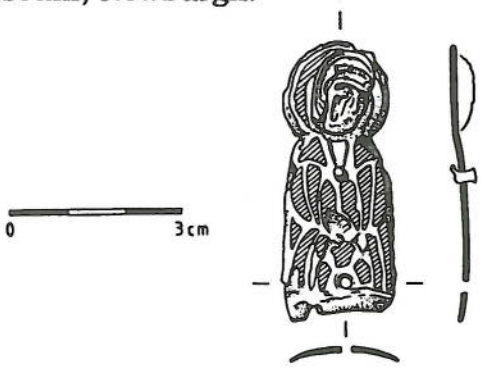

Fig. 4 Enamelled mount found at Ballinbriech

MUSICAL FINDS AND MEDIEVAL SCOTLAND

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Accumulating evidence of medieval small finds is giving access to important details of Scottish music's remote past. In describing examples and noting gaps in the record for which evidence is still awaited, finds from other British and from Scandinavian sites must be drawn on to propose forms and date-ranges, as guidelines for future identification of all such fragmentary remains. Two examples of instruments, harps and bag-pipes, may serve as illustrations.

Fittings of bone and metal add considerably to knowledge of both forms and contexts of harps of the Middle Ages and, sooner or later, further finds will no doubt illuminate their still earlier evolution and origins, as they have for lyres. Most common are devices associated with stringing. Amongst tensioning pins (tuning-pegs) are specimens of copper alloy from Finlaggan Castle, Islay, and Castle Sween, Argyll. Bone examples are still few here, although common enough in urban, military and monastic sites elsewhere. The socketed keys which were used to turn them, hitherto more elusive, now include several from south of the Border, for example from Battle Abbey, Sussex, from the City of London, and from metal-detectorist activity in East Anglia. The identifying characteristic of those used to tune bone pegs is their rectangular (rather than square) internal cross-section, matching those of the heads of the pegs themselves – which still bear

marks of their use. Even the actual strings are now beginning to be identified: horse-hair is implied by the forms of some bone pegs from the north and west of England, whilst actual spools or coils of wire, typically of copper-alloy, have now been identified in England and Scandinavia as well as in Scotland, some as isolated finds, as at Fast Castle, Berwickshire, but others, significantly, in varying degrees of association with tuning-pegs, as in the instrument-maker's house at St Aldate's, Oxford, and sites in Norway and Sweden. To these can now be added one at Castle Sween which was accompanied (in a nearby context) by a copper-alloy peg. Amongst bone examples, musical identity (at one time controversial) can now be confirmed by friction-wear analysis of their cylindrical shafts.

Pieces of reed pipes both of bone and wood already suggest ways in which historical horn-pipe and bag-pipe chanters could have achieved their modern, traditional forms. Their absence so far amongst Scottish finds is probably just an accident of survival. Reed pipes are of course a very ancient family of instruments, with several precursors from south of the border and across the North Sea, and of which the oldest, from caves in France and Germany, date from at least 35,000 years ago. Of early medieval specimens, those of bone should not be confused with the more numerous medieval class of bone flutes, which they superficially resemble and for which they are often still mistaken . New finds from eastern England show a discrete class of three- to six-hole instruments, played singly or in pairs, made from the metapodials of deer (bones curiously avoided in making flutes) with the insertion or one or more reeds made presumably from the native species. We still do no know whether such pipes were played as found, or were part of some larger structure, and hence whether they could represent our earliest true bag-pipe chanters or their immediate precursors. The earliest, of the 8th century, may suggest a horn-pipe structure, i.e. without bag. A Middle Saxon pair of deer metapodials from the Suffolk coast, each with six finger-holes and originally joined together side by side, bears, at one end only, traces of insertion into some kind of stock or horn. A Late Saxon specimen from York, carved and drilled from apple-wood, similarly bears a single tenon for insertion into some missing structure, while at the other end it expands into what now appears to be a mouth-piece or 'reed-cup'. However 9th to 11th century wooden examples from Lund in Sweden, from Britsum in the Netherlands and elsewhere preserve tenons at both ends, compatible with use as bag-pipes as well as horn-pipes. A small instrument is illustrated in the hands of one of King David's musicians in the 12th-century York psalter in Glasgow University Library, in which chanter and bag are drawn clearly without a mouth-pipe. Could a bellows-driven pipe, of Borders type, be indicated already at so early a date?

Acknowledgements
The writer is indebted to many archaeological colleagues in the field and in museums throughout Scotland and elsewhere. Especial thanks are due to Gordon Ewart, David Caldwell and Keith Mitchell for access to finds from Castle Sween, Argyll, from Finlaggan Castle, Islay, and from Fast Castle, Berwickshire.

THE NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF SCOTLAND JET PROJECT

Fraser Hunter
National Museums of Scotland

For several years the National Museums of Scotland have been engaged in an analytical and archaeological study of jet and related materials in Scotland. Neolithic to Bronze Age material is being studied by Alison Sheridan and Mary David, and Iron Age and later material by Fraser Hunter.

The work was prompted by recent advances in analytical technique which allow the discrimination of jet from visually similar materials (mainly coal, lignite and oil shale). Too often archaeologists use imprecise terminology, yet discrimination is of great importance, as jet has very restricted sources – Whitby is the only important British source, while north west Spain is the key European one. The other materials are much more widely available. Hence accurate identification can throw considerable light on wide-ranging contacts.

The techniques used are non-destructive, including X-ray fluorescence analysis and X-radiography, supplemented by microscopic examination. Recent work has concentrated on Norse period material and on medieval jet.

In the *Norse Period* almost no jet was used in Viking Scotland; only one example is known, a bead from a burial on Eigg. A range of other material, lignite, cannel coal and oil shale, was utilised. The source of these raw materials is of interest. In the Norse areas these materials are largely absent. Norse sites in Orkney and Shetland produce both artefacts and working debris, implying that blocks of the raw material were imported, the cannel coal and oil shale probably from Sutherland, the lignite either from Ireland or the Inner Hebrides. The lack of jet indicates only limited contacts down the eastern seaboard.

These black lithic materials were used exclusively for jewellery, bangles, beads and finger rings.

The *Medieval Period* sees a much more restricted use of jet. The habit of wearing black bangles, so common in the Iron Age and early historic periods, is not represented on any medieval sites. Jet is rare in medieval Scotland and has restricted uses. There are a number of early crosses, of 11th to 12th-century date, with ring and dot decoration. These continue an early historic tradition. There are a number of beads, probably from rosaries, and gaming pieces.

Fig. 5 Three jet pendants in the form of crosses, found in excavations in Perth. Not to scale

The material from Perth, from Fast Castle, and two pieces from Whithorn have been analysed so far. All the objects are true jet. Moreover, from comparison with samples of raw material it has proved possible to distinguish Whitby jet from Spanish jet. This is of great importance and considerable interest, as the use of Spanish jet is closely linked to souvenirs of the cult of St James. All the jet from Perth High Street came from Whitby, while all the jet from Fast Castle came from Spain. The latter is late medieval, 14th to 16th century, the time when the Santiago cult of St James was flourishing. It is likely these represent pilgrim's souvenirs.

The author would welcome communication and other samples of material for analysis.

MEDIEVAL ARTEFACTS FROM FALKIRK & DISTRICT

Geoff B Bailey

Falkirk is typical of many of Scotland's late burghs in that it possesses few objects from its medieval past. It is not that the Falkirk area was not important at this period. Situated to the west of Edinburgh and Linlithgow, to the south of Stirling and to the east of Glasgow, it has always had a strategic role. It is simply that there was not a materially rich culture in this part of the country at that time, and what few prestige objects there were have been lost or recycled at a later date.

A look at Scotland's foremost collection housed in the National Museum in Edinburgh reveals that the only items relating to the Falkirk district are dated to the beginning and end of the Group's time span. These are a 9th-century silver brooch from Dunipace (RCHAMS 1963, 37), and some 16th-century green-glazed pottery manufactured in the kilns at Stenhousemuir (ibid., 445).

Objects may be scarce but sites are not. The Falkirk district has a range of medieval sites. Ecclesiastical sites include the nunnery of St Mary at Manuel and parish churches at Kinneil, Carriden and Airth. Secular sites of higher status include a series of mottes, including Watling Lodge and Slamannan and a massive timber hall of the 9th century in Callander Park, later associated with the thanes of Callander. The only finds associated with the early timber hall were two lead sheets, rolled up in the manner of Roman curse tablets and deposited in a pit along with a stone spindle whorl. The closest parallels for these are unstratified finds from Northumbria, attributed in the past to the Dark Ages. A series of later medieval baronial tower houses has produced equally sparse finds.

Despite the presence of these prestigious sites as well as of prosperous burghs – Airth, Falkirk, Stirling and Linlithgow, as well as the unofficial burgh of Carriden – no stray finds of medieval date have come to light over the years, nor has this gap been filled by recent

excavation. In Falkirk most of the early town is encumbered by later development and limited trenching has only recovered material from the 17th century onward (MacAskill 1982). At Carriden part of the medieval village adjacent to the parish church was excavated in 1990. Parallel with the gravelled main road lay a house with a beaten earth floor and a large central hearth pit. The walls of this building were of banked earth, only partially retained by stone. In places the outer face of this bank had been replaced with a dry stone dyke. These walls had survived because of the depth of deposits in this area. The site had been levelled up during emparkment in the 1810s. Elsewhere the site had been levelled down, and ploughing had evidently removed walls of a similar nature. Here the pottery assemblage was relatively rich for the 13th and 14th centuries, and was dominated by white gritty imported wares from England as well as by local copies in a pinkish buff fabric.

At Airth there is the classic example of settlement drift, with the original burgh located beside the parish church and castle. Airth was created a royal burgh in 1203 by William the Lion, and redesignated a burgh of barony in 1597, associated with the development of its seaport. By the 15th century it had moved north-westwards and appears to have been centred around a mercat cross which until recently stood alone in a field. This crude shaft has been known as the Headless Cross since the 17th century. The general direction of movement continued, and an estate plan of 1764 shows that there were two settlements. High Airth was now focused on a well and a cross-roads 210m north-west of the Headless Cross, and Low Airth lay a quarter of a mile further on, on the shore of the Forth adjacent to the harbour. The Low Town contained a new mercat cross, dated 1697. Excavation in 1997 around the Headless Cross failed to locate any features of the medieval burgh. Instead, there was ridge and furrow, heavily truncated on the hill top. Towards the east end of the site, a back-filled stone quarry had been in use since the late 17th century. A search through the estate's archives revealed that when the park was landscaped in the early 19th century, the existing stone buildings were carefully dismantled and the stone re-used. Large quantities of earth were carted away as part of this exercise in which the top of the hill was planed off. It became clear that there was not going to be any stratified material, but the possibility remained that during the 19th-century landscaping work, artefacts might have been re-distributed in the general area. The local metal detectorist club was invited to test this hypothesis and readily agreed to make a sweep of the adjacent fields. The results of this survey appear to confirm the former existence of a medieval burgh. Three silver pennies of Edward I and one of Edward II were found in close proximity, and the coin sequence continued patchily down to the present day. Perhaps the most unusual object found was a wheel-shaped sword pommel in copper alloy, of which Jackie Moran writes:

'Wheel-shaped pommel, height 47mm, width 52mm, depth 40mm, with a perforation running through it for the tang. It has a hard-baked clay core which is covered by copper alloy. The metal is a skilful, seamless casting. The

wheel pommel was a common design, dating from the middle of the 13th century and remained popular well into the 15th (Oakeshott 1964, 96).

'The clay core in this pommel is an unusual feature. The only other recorded copper alloy sword pommel with a clay core is one found at Mervinshaw, Roxburghshire (Stevenson 1975, 218-19). Cast pommels are generally hollow, although it is possible that other cores may exist unnoticed. This could occur where pommels are still attached to their tangs. Leaving the clay core in place would have had certain benefits such as helping prevent the metal being dented and adding weight to the hilt'' balance against the blade.'

There may be a military context for this find: according to Blind Harry (albeit a rather unreliable source), William Wallace crossed the Firth in a fishing boat at Airth and subsequently captured the English-occupied fortress there. His uncle, the minister of Dunipace, was set free from its dungeon.

A bronze figurine of a lion (Fig. 6) came from the same area, but has not yet been confidently dated. A detectorist had previously found a lead spindle whorl in the adjacent field, in 1996. It is decorated with a common line-and-dot motif (Bailey 1996, 107-8), usually dated to around 1600. In 1997 a further ten whorls, with variations on this decoration, were found (Fig. 7). Subsequent finds included two communion tokens and a number of 18th-century lead seals.

Of the medieval trade and industry of the area, few finds support the documentary evidence. Coal-mining was mentioned as early as the 13th century in Carriden, and salt-making was underway on a number of coastal sites by the 12th century. Ships were being built at Airth at an early date, and possibly also at Blackness. Naturally agriculture was the principal occupation of the majority of the population.

The impression remains of an impoverished country with an aceramic culture. From the 13th century, pottery was imported from England, and was soon copied, becoming far more prolific by the 16th century. Potteries were established in the area at Stenhousemuir, Laurieston and Grangemouth. Throughout the period metal was valuable and was re-cycled whenever possible. As late as 1746, after the Second Battle of Falkirk, the local blacksmith was still to be seen prising horseshoes off the dead animals on the battlefield, for re-use. In the 16th century even small iron objects such as pan hooks receive a mention in legal documents (Reid 1993).

It is only where the early deposits are deeply stratified that we can expect to find much in the way of structures, and of any associated artefacts. Such conditions are well known in Perth, but unfortunately not in the Falkirk district. In the absence of such sites, chance, and the labours of the metal detectorist, are crucial.

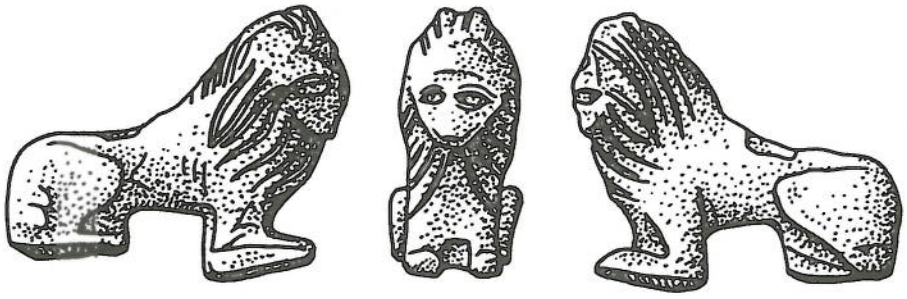

Fig. 6 Bronze figurine of a lion found near Airth

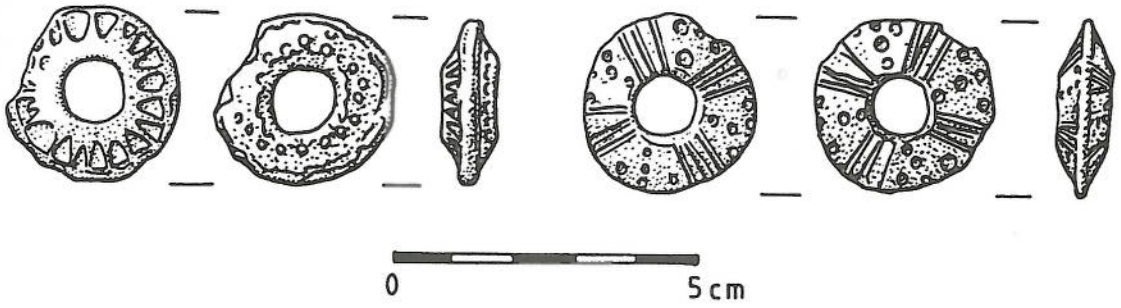

Fig. 7 Two lead spindle whorls found near Airth

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