



National
Museums
Scotland

The Galloway Hoard

Viking-Age Treasure



Available
to tour from
2025



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Cover image: The great range of materials in the Galloway Hoard – here photographed pre-conservation – make it unlike any other Viking-age hoard

Left: Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions on Viking-age silver arm-rings show the unusual cultural mix in the Galloway Hoard

“Nothing like this has ever been found in Scotland... research so far is pointing to a new understanding of Scotland in the international context of the earliest Viking Age.”

Dr Martin Goldberg, Curator, National Museums Scotland

Introducing the Galloway Hoard

The Galloway Hoard: Viking-Age Treasure presents one of the most intriguing hoards ever discovered. The Galloway Hoard is the richest and most varied group of Viking-age objects ever found in Britain or Ireland. As research on the treasure advances, it is re-writing what we know about Scotland's past and connections with Europe and the wider world.

The treasure had lain buried for over 1,000 years when it was discovered in 2014 by a metal detectorist in southwest Scotland. Since acquiring the Hoard in 2017, National Museums Scotland has been undertaking conservation and research on the treasure. The exhibition showcases the results of five years of in-depth research, presenting a series of amazing discoveries which have attracted world-wide attention. It includes behind-the-scenes films of the painstaking conservation work and interviews with the many scholars who have helped to reveal the hidden secrets of the Hoard. It is curated by Dr Martin Goldberg, Principal Curator of Early Medieval and Viking Collections at National Museums Scotland.

The exhibition opened at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh and ran from May until September 2021. It then toured Scotland to Kirkcudbright Galleries (October 2021–July 2022), where it received record visitor numbers, and Aberdeen Art Gallery (July–October 2022). This critically acclaimed exhibition is now available for a limited international tour until 2027.

While it will take many years to unlock all the secrets hidden in the Galloway Hoard, this touring exhibition is a unique snap-shot of fascinating archaeological work in progress.



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1. A unique golden bird-pin

Opposite: Gold filigree detail on the black-stone pendant



that suggest connections across Europe and beyond.



The Galloway Hoard

Viking-Age Treasure

© Ruth Armstrong Photography



In the 9th century AD, Scandinavian connections across the North Sea brought warfare, trade and settlement to Britain and Ireland. Scandinavian dynasties controlled territories from centres in Dublin and York, disrupting existing kingdoms and politics. A fresh influx of silver is one of the best archaeological indicators of these new influences. Silver arm rings, like those in the Galloway Hoard, are mostly found in Ireland and in hoards of silver bullion discovered around the Irish Sea, in North Wales and northern England.

Galloway is in an ambiguous position, at the westernmost limit of Anglo-Saxon Northumbria, but also connected to this Irish Sea zone. The Galloway Hoard is Scotland's earliest Viking-age hoard, buried at Balmaghie in Kirkcubrightshire, sometime before AD900. Evidence for buildings around the Hoard site has been found, but needs further investigation.

© Ruth Armstrong Photography

A journey through the exhibition

Buried around AD900, the Galloway Hoard brings together a stunning variety of materials and treasures from across Britain and Ireland, and as far away as Asia. This fascinating exhibition transports us back to a critical moment in history: the formation of the political entities we now know as Scotland, England, and Ireland, in a time of Viking raids.

The Galloway Hoard was buried in layers, and the exhibition follows that structure, revealing more and more unusual material, from a top layer of silver arm rings to a lidded vessel containing a host of unique objects. Large-scale photography, film, and interactives play an integral role in offering close-up views of hidden details and bringing the visitor into the process of discovery.

However, this exhibition is much more than a showcase of archaeological objects. Underpinned by ongoing research, it reveals what we know of the stories of those who made, traded, treasured, and buried the Galloway Hoard.



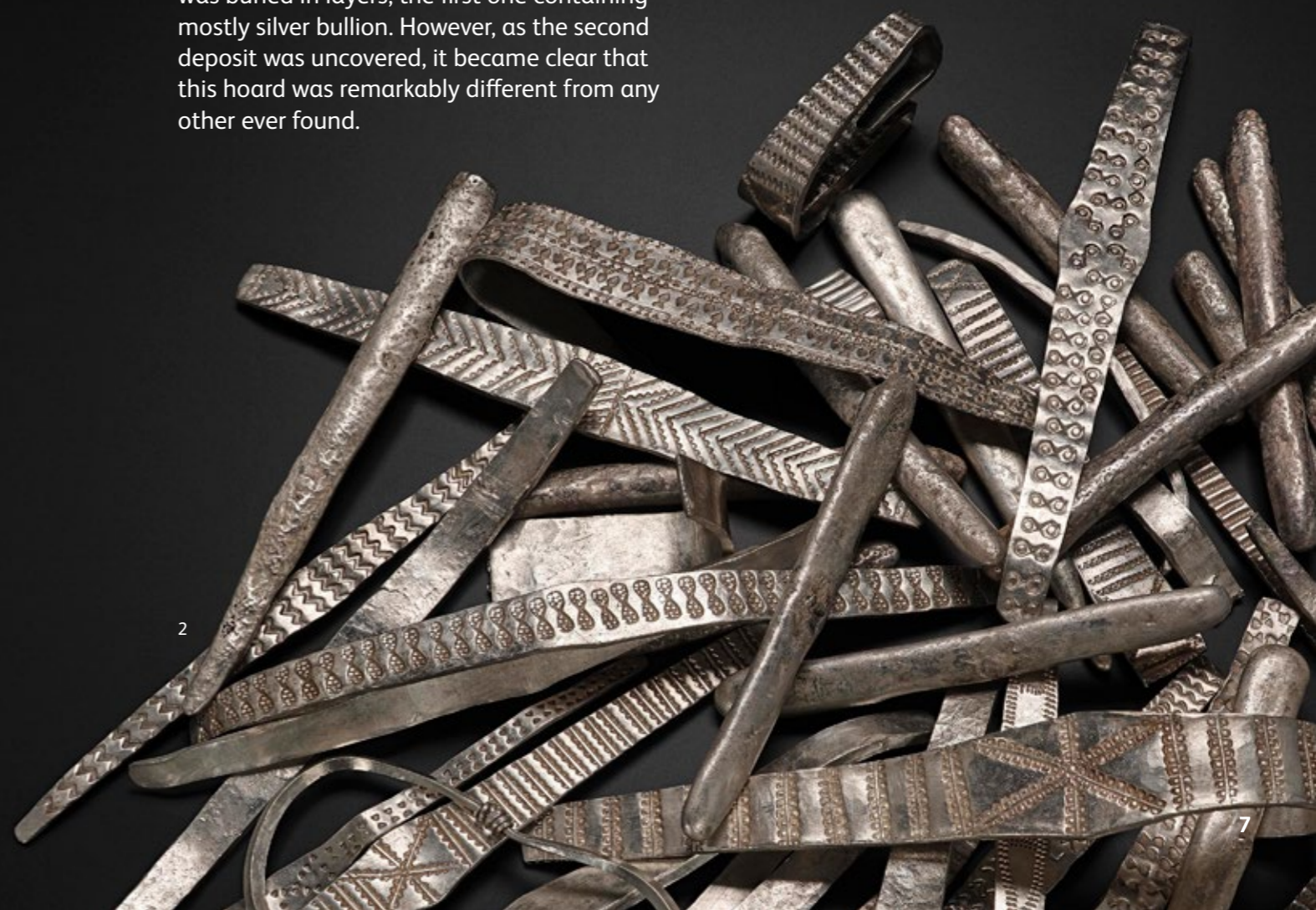
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1 Introduction

The exhibition begins by introducing the historical context in which the Galloway Hoard was buried, about 100 years after the first Viking attacks in Britain and Ireland. With the support of a film, this section presents a society driven by silver, the main component of most Viking-age hoards. The Galloway Hoard was buried in layers, the first one containing mostly silver bullion. However, as the second deposit was uncovered, it became clear that this hoard was remarkably different from any other ever found.

“We like to think of objects as having lives...Our research will trace the stories of the objects back to when and where they were made, as well as why they were buried at that time and in that place.”

Dr Martin Goldberg, Curator, National Museums Scotland



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- 1. The largest single collection of Late Anglo-Saxon brooches
- 2. Over 5kg of silver bullion and arm-rings



© Ruth Armstrong Photography

© Ruth Armstrong Photography

2 A hoard of Viking silver?

Visitors embark on a journey to discover why the Galloway Hoard is a much more complex discovery than the initial findings indicated. A film about the value and use of silver bullion contextualizes the groupings of ingots and arm-rings which made up the bulk of the top and lower layers of the Hoard.

Objects featured here include an Anglo-Saxon cross found among the bullion, displayed alongside a film about the careful conservation process which revealed depictions of the four apostles. Other highlights include arm-rings with runic inscriptions on them. Rather than the Norse runes we might expect in a 'Viking' hoard, they are Old English name elements. Four inscriptions in the lower bullion group hint at four owners, as does a cluster of four large, decorated arm-rings bound together, which surrounded a little wooden box that contained a gold ring, an ingot and an exotic-looking bird-shaped pin.



1. Anglo-Saxon cross (detail showing St Matthew)
2. Ribbon arm-ring cluster
3. Gold ring, bird pin and ingot



© Historic Environment Scotland

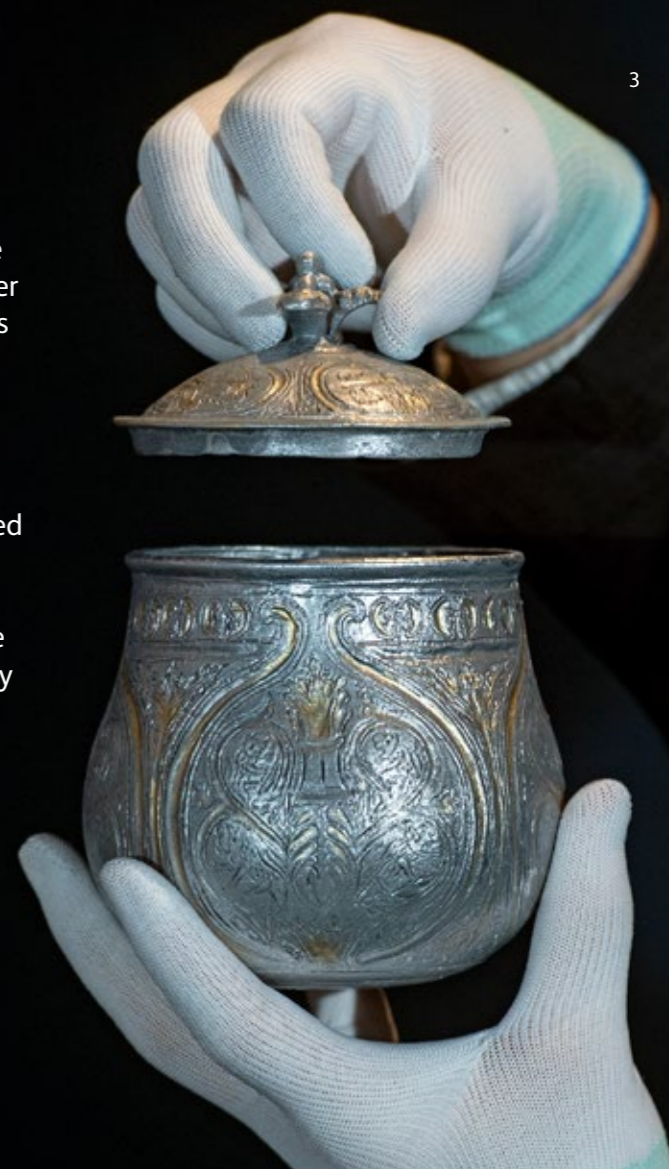


© Ruth Armstrong Photography

3 The vessel

Everything else in the exhibition was, remarkably, found tightly packed in a silver-gilt lidded vessel buried in the lower deposit. Two layers of textile wrapping the vessel have survived. The preservation of textiles and other organic materials is very unusual and provides important clues about how the Hoard was brought together over time.

To protect the textiles, CT scanning was used to reveal the decorated surface of the vessel. Tigers, leopards and religious motifs associated with Central Asia hint at an exotic and distant origin. The vessel cannot be displayed because of the fragility of the textiles, but the exhibition features a life-sized 3D printed copy and a film in which researchers explain what makes this object so special.



1. The textile-wrapped vessel, as it looked when discovered
2. Film of the vessel
3. A 3D printed replica of what the vessel looks like underneath the textile wrapping



4 Unpacking the vessel

The exhibition here explores the various exotic objects that were packed inside the vessel, many carefully wrapped in leather, silk, and linen. Visitors are presented with unique examples of precious Anglo-Saxon metalwork, such as brooches with faces hinting at esoteric Christian meanings.

- 1. Graphic showing the items contained in the vessel
- 2. Base of the rock crystal jar with Latin letters spelling out 'Bishop Hyguald made this'



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Not everything inside the vessel is made of precious materials. A collection of curios made of glass, rock-crystal, and even balls of dirt were nestled among silks and more recognisable treasure. They were likely to have been handed down for generations as heirlooms, as shown by the only coin in the hoard, minted for Coenwulf, King of Mercia, who died in AD821. This older coin was incorporated into a pendant with an heirloom bead. A film explains to visitors some of the scientific methods that researchers have used to record and understand the objects which are on display or currently under investigation.

5 A changed view

This final section captures the sense of on-going discovery made during research conducted as part of the 'Unwrapping the Galloway Hoard' project at National Museums Scotland. A black-stone pendant with gold filigree and two unique Anglo-Saxon decorative straps are objects showcased in this section. Since the exhibition's first display in Edinburgh, new digital interactives have been added as new stories and objects have emerged from the conservation process. This final section will show how the Galloway Hoard has changed our view of this crucial period and Scotland's connections with the wider world.

An air of mystery still surrounds the treasure. With every answer more questions emerge and research on this spectacular treasure will continue for decades to come. This exhibition weaves together the threads of what we have learnt so far.



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- 1. Dr Martin Goldberg
- 2. Gold animal-headed mounts in a silk cord bundle
- 3. Black-stone pendant

Star objects

The exhibition presents extraordinary objects from the Galloway Hoard, capturing a variety of styles, materials, and origins. Each object provides a unique insight into the wider world of the Viking Age.



Bird pin

Gold is much rarer to find than silver in Viking-age hoards. The gold objects in the Hoard are distinct and individual, perhaps coming from distant places and different manufacturing traditions. This bird-pin is beautifully crafted, but its meaning is enigmatic. Reminiscent of a flamingo, it could represent a phoenix symbolising Christ's resurrection.

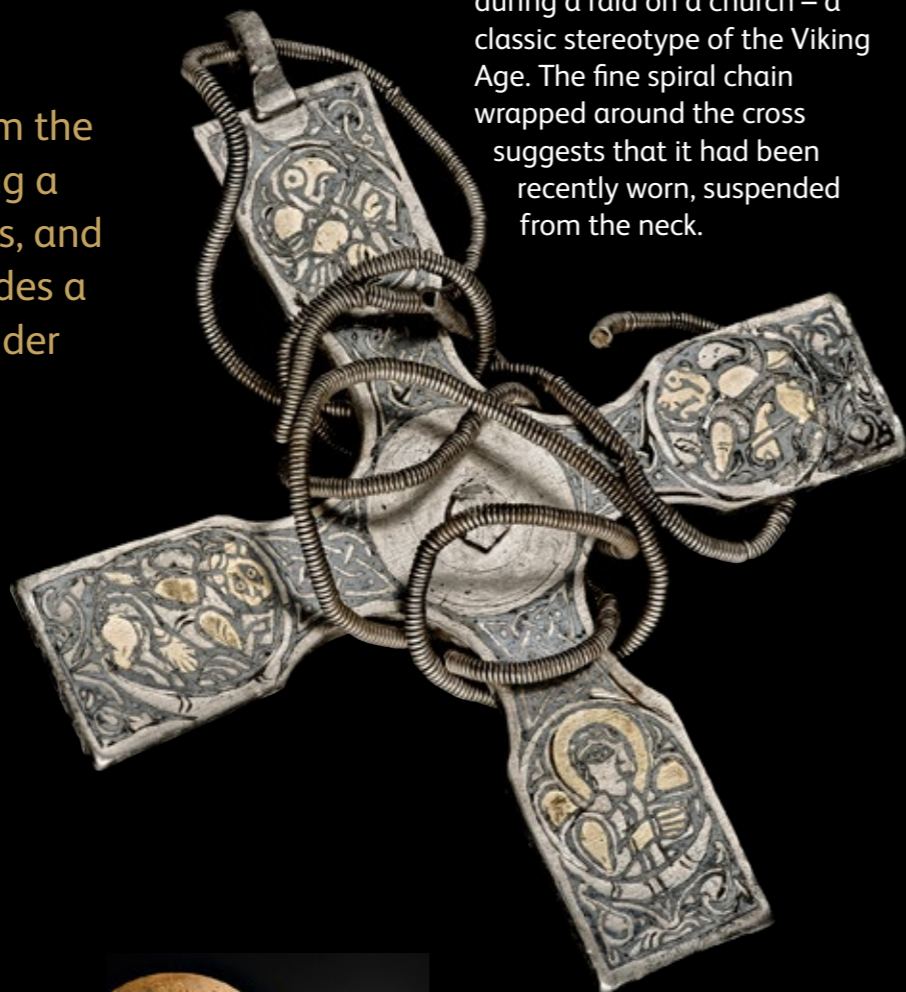


Relic beads and pendants

The vessel contained glass beads, pendants and curios. Some were probably strung together and most are heavily worn from use. Such beads are more commonly found in burials from the sixth century AD. They were valued for their age and passed down for three hundred years before they were carefully wrapped and placed in the vessel.

Pectoral cross

Christian objects are unusual in Viking-age hoards. We can easily imagine this cross being robbed from a Christian cleric during a raid on a church – a classic stereotype of the Viking Age. The fine spiral chain wrapped around the cross suggests that it had been recently worn, suspended from the neck.



Black-stone pendant

The gold filigree framework of this pendant contains a carefully shaped metamorphic rock. Traces of gold on the stone suggest it was used to test the purity of precious materials. This large pendant was strung on a silk cord and bundled together with other gold objects. The silk cord would have originated in Asia and is the earliest known example found in Scotland.



Entangled arm-rings

There are four elaborately decorated silver ribbon arm-rings that are bound together, as if in a contract. Four arm-rings suggest four people, probably the owners of the silver. The largest is a double arm-ring, twice the size of the others, decorated with beasts, probably meaning one of the owners had a considerably higher status than the rest.



Quatrefoil brooches

Within the vessel was the first collection of Late Anglo-Saxon brooches from Scotland, containing three pairs of non-identical brooches. Two brooches are cross-shaped, a design unique to the Galloway Hoard. The iconography depicts two of the five senses – sight and hearing. On one, all the emphasis is on the eyes and on the other (pictured left) the ears are exaggerated – they are ringing because blast horns are being blown.

Specifications

The exhibition premiered at the National Museum of Scotland and was on show from 29 May to 12 September 2021.

Size

The exhibition requires a minimum space of approximately 350m² (4,300 ft²).

Objects

Over 90 objects from early medieval archaeology, mostly made of silver, but also unusual materials such as gold, glass and rock crystal. Objects include carefully decorated silver arm-rings, Anglo-Saxon metalwork such as a cross pendant and brooches, and precious objects decorated with gold filigree.

The exhibition requires high-security display cases and environmentally controlled galleries with constant invigilation.

Target audience

With a breadth of content re-interpreting what is known of the earliest Viking Age in Britain, Ireland and beyond, this exhibition will appeal to wide-ranging adult audiences interested in archaeology and early medieval history. The exhibition remains current and relevant as it incorporates the latest discoveries from the 'Unwrapping the Galloway Hoard' research programme (2021–2024).

Schedule

Available to tour from 2025 to September 2027. Standard hire periods are three to four months.

Exhibition publication

A complementary publication is available, *The Galloway Hoard: Viking-Age Treasure* by Dr Martin Goldberg, curator of the exhibition, and Dr Mary Davis, Galloway Hoard Conservator at National Museums Scotland.

Included in the hire fee

The Galloway Hoard: Viking-Age Treasure touring exhibition is inclusive of the following:

- The loan of objects from National Museums Scotland's Scottish History & Archaeology collection
- Curation and exhibition concept
- A selection of audiovisual software commissioned for the exhibition (in English)
- Exhibition text (in English)
- Collection crating
- The services of up to three National Museums Scotland couriers to install and de-install collections
- Marketing package – provision of draft media release, selection of images for marketing and press use, and National Museums Scotland branding guidelines
- Online access to a selection of 3D digital models of the Galloway Hoard
- License to re-use a selection of exhibition artwork and graphics within the exhibition



Our mission is to preserve, interpret and make accessible for all, the past and present of Scotland, other nations and cultures, and the natural world. Around 2.5 million people visit our four venues each year. The National Museum of Scotland, in Edinburgh, is the UK's most visited museum outside London.

Through our touring exhibitions, we offer our internationally important collection and diverse research to a broader range of audiences, revealing the many fascinating stories these objects tell. Since 2016, seven exhibitions organised by National Museums Scotland have travelled to 26 museums around Scotland and the world.

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