The Finds Research Group AD700-1700

DATASHEET 44

Early-Medieval 'Collared' Pins

by

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Introduction

Metal dress or hairpins are an important category of material culture for much of the medieval period and beyond (see examples in Fanning 1994; Egan 2005). This datasheet is concerned with the most numerous series – the collared pins – along with an associated type that may lack a collar (plate heads). These forms are often found in proximity to one another on settlement sites, and have hitherto been thought to be characteristic of the 8th and 9th centuries. Through a detailed analysis of objects recovered from well-studied sites in Yorkshire, it has been possible to propose a detailed typochronology for the forms encountered. A brief overview is given, but the details of this case study, including the statistical analyses upon which the study is based, are to be published elsewhere, and herein the focus is the delineation of the typology in itself. The aim is to aid identification, dating, and recording in the field and at the finds bench, and it is also hoped that the study will raise awareness among non-specialists, and thus bring new material to light.

Base-metal pins are a key find from early-medieval contexts in the British Isles. There are collections from the well-known excavations of the period such as Flixborough (Evans and Loveluck 2009) and York (Mainman and Rogers 2000), but in recent years our understanding of these sorts of items has been transformed through the work of

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metal detectorists and the Portable Antiquities Scheme (www.finds.org.uk; see Richards *et al.* 2009).

Since pins are usually in a fragmentary state when recovered from the plough zone, but complete when excavated *in situ*, it is likely that most were lost, rather than discarded as a result of breakage (Haldenby and Richards 2010, 1153). Insecurity of attachment and low intrinsic value no doubt contributed to this high rate of loss which, when coupled with the dating insights discussed below, makes pins a sensitive chronological indicator. Furthermore, work-hardening during manufacture and subsequent crystallisation explain shank friability, and make pins a good indicator of agricultural attrition, which can be seen to vary between sites (according to factors such as soil type and farming history), and to increase over time (Haldenby and Richards 2010, 1151-62).

Research Dataset

The scheme outlined below emerges from ongoing research to be published elsewhere (Haldenby forthcoming.). The research draws its dataset from three finds archives: high-resolution metal-detector surveys at seven Middle-Saxon sites (some with an Anglo-Scandinavian component) in Yorkshire (see **Table 1**); national-level data from the Portable Antiquities Scheme (www.finds.org.uk), and published excavation reports from key sites. The latter comprise Coppergate, York (Mainman and Rogers 2000), Fishergate, York (Rogers 1993), Flixborough, Lincs (Evans and Loveluck 2009) and Southampton, Hants (Hinton 1996). When one compares the relative numbers of particular forms of artefact from each data source ('pin head profiles' and 'artefact profiles'), one perceives, in each instance, a high level of correspondence between profiles from individual sites and those based on county-level data from the PAS. This allows us to have a certain amount of confidence in the patterning identified.

Early-Medieval Pins: An Overview

Of 1696 early-medieval non-ferrous pins examined, just 13% lie outside the main 'collared' series described below. Nonetheless, it is appropriate to briefly consider the sequence as a whole.

Pins found in 7th- and 8th-century burials, and sometimes on settlement sites, tend to be short with discoidal heads, and may be pierced to facilitate the linking of pins in pairs, by chains (**Fig 1**).

Site	Location	Dates of Occupation	Approx. Area/m^2 *	No. Artefacts **	Excavated?
Cottam A	E Yorks Wolds	c.AD 750-867	5 000	55	Y
Cottam B (N)	E Yorks Wolds	c.AD.860-930	10 000	78	Y
Cottam B (S)	E Yorks Wolds	c.AD.720-860	10 000	113	Y
Cowlam	E Yorks Wolds	c.AD 720-867	10 000	61	Y
'Near Pocklington'	E Yorks Wolds	c.AD 600-867	15 000	65	N
'Near York'	Vale of York	c.AD 700-900	15 0000	202	N
South Newbald	E Yorks Wolds	c.AD 730-900	15 0000	269	N

Table 1. Key sites referred to in the text. Dating is based on evidence from artefact typology and, where undertaken, stratigraphic excavation.

*Determined by extent of artefact spread and visible cropmarks.

** Pins, strapends and stycas recovered by metal-detecting and excavation (where undertaken).

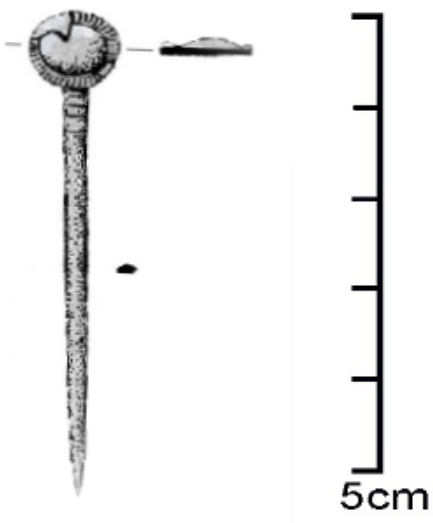

Fig 1 Early Disc-Headed Pin, from Southampton, (after Hinton 1996, Fig 12, 169/634)

Most 8th-century pins (**Fig 2a**) have heads that share the latter features but they are a little longer. They have larger heads – commonly 2 to 3 cm across – with elaborate gilding and chip-carved decoration.

These, like the previous group, have a widespread distribution, but they are more plentiful than their predecessors and are found as casual losses, often on settlement sites. Apparently contemporary with this group (on the basis of similar shape and size, and the presence of single perforations) is a small group to which multiple ring-and-dot decoration is applied. Such ornament is often intense, with over thirty motifs applied, but is restricted to a single face **(Fig 2b).** The dataset contains seven examples, each from a different Yorkshire site. The shanks of another rare and likely 8th- century type, often in silver and gilt,

are topped with moulded animal heads.

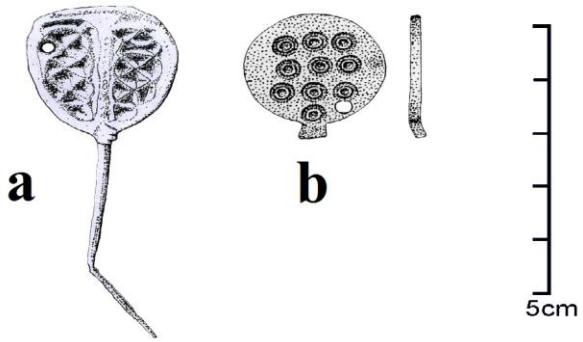

Fig 2: Large Plate-headed Pins (a) from Cottam B, after Haldenby 1990, Fig 1.3; (b) from South Newbald, after Leahy 2000, Fig 6.8.18.

A further early pin type has concentric grooving at the butt end of the shank, presumably for the attachment of a non-metallic head. These heads are rarely preserved, but in some cases traces of glass survive (Evans and Loveluck 2009, 35) (**Fig 3**).

An early date for these pins is suggested by their presence at Shakenoak, Oxfordshire, a site which terminated c. AD 750 (Brodribb *et al.* 1972, 69-73). Although a few examples are known from York, such headless pins are not found on any of the six East Yorkshire metal-detected sites, and there is only one on the PAS database. They appear to be more numerous towards the south, being well known from sites such as Flixborough and Hamwic.

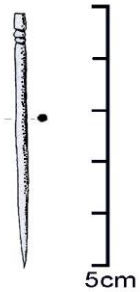

Fig 3: Headless Pin, from Southampton, after Hinton 1996, Fig 13, 24/10.

Pins with spiral-wire heads **(Fig 4)** also occur at Shakenoak, but seem to have been long-lived, as examples are known from 9th- and 10th-century contexts at Hamwic and York respectively. Once again, this type is more common south of the Humber.

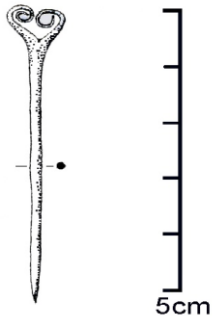

Fig 4: Spiral-wire-headed pin, from Southampton, after Hinton 1996, Fig 11, 254/144

Next come the collared series to be discussed below, which are argued here to date to the 9th century, and represent the majority of early-medieval pins. Subsequent to the collared series come two broad pin groups with longer shanks, one being lozenge -headed with three rounded projections (**Fig 5**), and the other with

a swivelling ring often attached to a polyhedral or baluster shaped head (popularly referred to as *ring-headed pins*; **Fig 6**). Twelve pins with lozenge heads are represented in the three datasets used here, including eight on the PAS database (six of which are from North Yorkshire, one from East Yorkshire, and one from Lincolnshire).

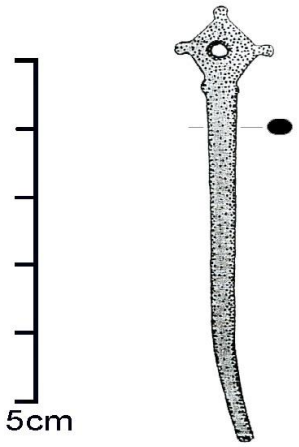

Fig 5: Lozenge -headed Pin (tip broken), from South Newbald, after Leahy 2000, Fig 6.5.10

There are fourteen ring-headed pins in these datasets, with seven coming from Coppergate, and the remainder being quite dispersed. They are a well known form from Viking-Age contexts, and it is likely that this and the previous group were introduced from Ireland in the late ninth or early tenth centuries (Fanning 1994).

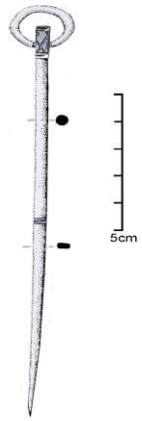

Fig 6: Ring-headed Pin, from Coppergate, York, after Mainman and Rogers 2000, Fig 1275, no. 10478.

'Collared' Pins

Having overviewed the general sequence, we are concerned now with the most numerous pin forms: what I will refer to as the 'collared' series. These pins make up 87% of the 1696 early-medieval non-ferrous pins examined. The series is characterized by common features such as a collar beneath the head, copper-alloy composition, swelling of the shank (in some cases; see Fig 14b below), and specific head forms. These pins average 60mm in length, and 90% of examples in the series have either polyhedral, biconical or globular heads, measuring 6-8 mm across. These and less common forms are discussed under 'Typology'. A small number are in silver, and a large minority are in iron. Gilding is rare, as are pins decorated with motifs other than ring-and-dot, which is seen frequently on polyhedral, globular, and plate-heads, but rarely on biconicals (see below for definitions).

These pins have been the subject of analysis by the author, and it is argued elsewhere (Haldenby *forthcoming*), and briefly below, that they are very largely of 9th century date. In a few cases, pins from other periods – particularly the eighth century – have collars, but their head forms invariably differ from the collared series outlined herein.

Manufacture and Use

Most of these pins appear to have been cast in one piece. Following casting, shanks were thinned and lengthened by hammering, before being finished. The finishing process involved the use of a file, particularly in chamfering the corners of simple cast-cuboid heads to create polyhedrons; in the fashioning of the collar; and the filing out of casting lugs, creating a flat top (see typology below). However, lugs were not removed from all examples, as can be seen in an example from York (Rogers 1993, Fig 662, 5345).

The absence of collared pins in burials goes someway to explaining the lack of agreement as to their function (Evans and Loveluck 2009, 40-41). Indeed, this may have varied over time, possibly involving both sexes, and suggested functions have included the securing of hair, veils or clothing. Apparently to reinforce attachment, shanks either swell or are 'hipped' in around 20% of pins in all areas except Hampshire. Here the figure is around 67%, echoing the trend observed in the pins from Hamwic (Leahy 2000, 71), possibly indicating local preference or continental imports through this wic.

Dating

These pins have frequently been assigned a broadly eighth- to ninth-century date, though the evidence on which this is based in not unambiguous. The present survey demonstrates their co-occurrence (in consistent ratios) with strapends and examples of Northumbria's *styca* coinage across a number of Middle-Saxon sites in East Yorkshire (Haldenby *forthcoming*). Accordingly, it is the author's view that collared pins should now be seen to be of principally ninth-century date. Indeed, their plain finish fits into a ninth-century milieu (in contrast to gilding, which was clearly the finish of choice on pins and other non-ferrous metalwork of the previous century). Moreover, it is notable that amongst quantities of earlier pin types in mid-eighth century contexts at Shakenoak, Oxon (Brodribb *et al.* 1972), the collared pins are absent, as are ninth century strap-ends.

Typology

Apart from the term 'Plate heads', introduced here to describe a variety of flattened head shapes, the classification outlined below is not novel, but rather constitutes something of a synthesis of terms already in common use (see

for instance Evans and Loveluck 2009; Mainman and Rogers 2000; Hinton 1996; Peers and Ralegh Radford 1943; references in Haldenby and Richards 2009). However, although the terminology is familiar, it has not always been applied consistently, and some clarification of terminology may be beneficial. As is traditional for pins, the classification is based on head morphology. This is appropriate, but of course means that many finds of broken shanks cannot be assigned to type. Nonetheless, the presence of distension would at least imply general membership of the collared pin series.

Analyses of the pin forms recorded at the East Yorkshire metal-detected sites (Table 1, above) indicates chronological patterning in the popularity of particular types (see Haldenby and Richards 2009, 309-315). For instance, it is clear that around the time of the Scandinavian settlement, pins with polyhedral heads declined, while others, including globular heads, those with longitudinal facets, and plate-headed forms emerged or saw continued use. The scheme outlined herein develops this work, drawing on data from more sites in Yorkshire. A detailed survey will be published elsewhere (Haldenby *in prep*), but certain patterns have been noted, such as the fact that pins with biconical heads (see **Fig 8** below) seem to have accompanied the polyhedral heads in decline around the time of the Scandinavian settlement.

For each of the types introduced below, a description of formal characteristics and variability is provided, together with what is known of their chronological and geographical distributions. Where significant, the number of examples is given as a proportion of the total number of collared pins on the PAS database (648 in mid-2010).

Polyhedrals **(Fig 7) 39%.** Polyhedral-headed pins are widespread, and ring and dot decoration is frequently observed (present on 80% of the 192 polyhedral-headed pins recorded on the PAS database), though usually only on the four vertical faces and the top. However, in East Anglia plain facets are more common (ring and dot being recorded on only 54% of the 69 such pins on the PAS database).

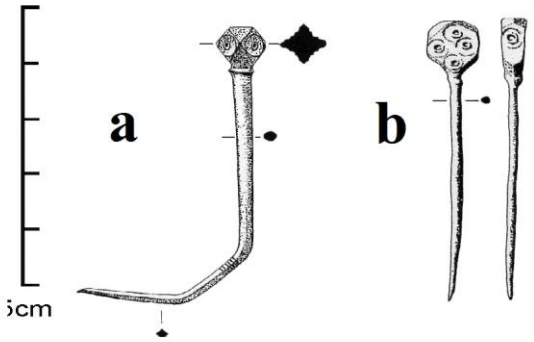

Fig 7 Polyhedral Pins (a) Standard type, from Cottam B, after Haldenby 1992, Fig 2.6 (b) Flat-topped from Cottam B, after Haldenby 1990, Fig 3.

One may also identify a subgroup within this type (**Fig 7b**), representing 10 to 15% of polyhedrals.

Their heads are flattened, producing two faces large enough to accommodate 3 or 4 ringed dots. The group as a whole declined in use at the start of the Anglo-Scandinavian period.

Biconicals **(Fig 8) 18%.** Biconicals are characterised by their 'double-cone' shape, though there is some within-group variation. Thus, while most have either a flattened circumference (57%), or have good biconical shape (30%), other forms are known (see Fig 8) and a rare variety has an inverted conical head.

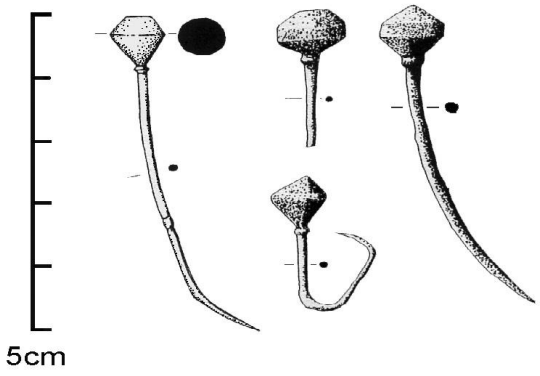

Fig 8: Biconical pins from Southampton (after Hinton 1996, Fig 10, 15/7) and Cottam B (after Haldenby 1990, Fig 3)

Biconical-headed pins are less common in central and southern counties (5% of collared pins) than in the north and east (20%), though Hampshire (with Hamwic) constitutes an important southern exception to this rule (20%). As with the polyhedrals, biconical-headed pins declined in use at the start of the Anglo-Scandinavian period.

Globular **(Fig 9) 34%.** Globular-headed pins are widespread, and a flat-topped variety forms a minority subgroup, except in most counties north of the Humber, where it is more prevalent and appears to become more common in the Anglo-Scandinavian period. At Cottam B, nine of the twelve globulars from the North area (characterised by evidence of activity between the Middle-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian periods) have a flat top. More generally, the 'globular' group as a whole became the dominant form in the late ninth century, and probably remained in use into the tenth century.

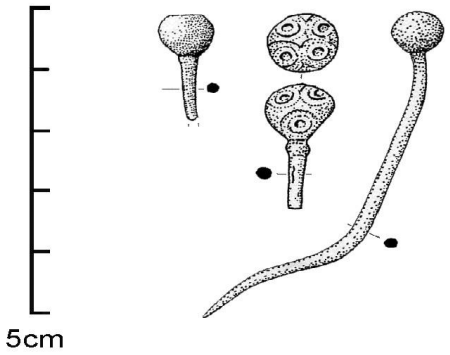

Fig 9: Globular pins from South Newbald (after Leahy 2000, Figs 6.7.31, 6.6.3; 6.6.21)

Pins with globular heads and longitudinal facets **(Fig 10) 1%.** Of the 24 examples of this form in the PAS database, most come from Yorkshire. Five additional examples are known from the North area at Cottam B, see above) suggesting that this variety emerged late in the series.

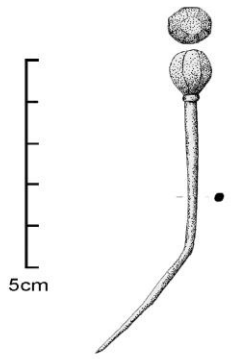

Fig 10: Globular pin with longitudinal facets, from Fishergate, York (after Rogers 1993, Fig 662, 5338)

Pins with Wrythen heads **(Fig 11) 4%.** These pins are characterized by heads with sinuous, incised grooving, which creates a swirling, sigmoidal motif. Though they do occur in the north, most are found south of the Humber, with concentrations in Lincolnshire, East Anglia and Southampton. Several feature incised crosses on the upper facet of the head. Since so few appear in the Yorkshire metal-detector archives, no suggestions can be made here as to where they lie in the collared pin series.

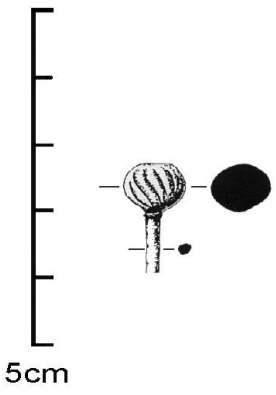

Fig 11: Wrythen pin, from Cottam B (after Haldenby 1994, Fig 1.6)

Plate-headed **(Fig 12) 4%.** Of the five main varieties illustrated below, most are disc-shaped, and they invariably feature ring and dot decoration (usually on one face only). Collars are absent or rudimentary (quite possibly since these would not be in keeping with flat heads), but shank length, appearance and their coexistence with other types indicates that they belong with the 'collared' series described herein.

They come mainly from north of the Humber, where they represent 11% of collared pins. Again at Cottam B's North area (Mid-Saxon to Anglo-Scandinavian; see above) (Haldenby 1990, 55; 1992, 29; 1994, 52), the figure is higher (11 plate-headed pins make up almost 24% of the assemblage), suggesting that the type was most important late in the series. There are also nine plate-heads in Tweddle et al.'s (1999) survey of 'Anglian' material excavated from York.

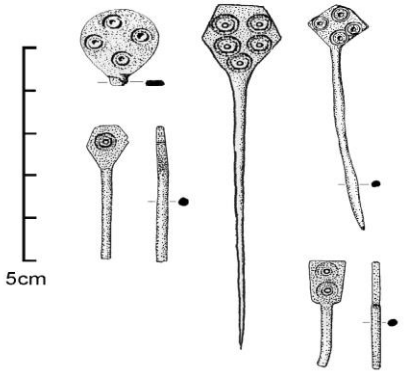

Fig 12: Plate-headed pins, from Cottam B (after Haldenby 1990, Fig 3 and unpublished); Southampton (after Hinton 1996, Fig 12, 30/73); and South Newbald (after Leahy 2000, Fig 6.8.16, 6.8.17)

Baluster heads **(Fig 13).** This form appears to have developed from the polyhedral-headed pin. Only 11 examples are represented in the dataset, and all are from the north, including three pins from each of Coppergate, Fishergate and Flixborough. This, together with the pin's resemblance to Viking-Age ring-headed pins, is suggestive of an Anglo-Scandinavian date and context of use.

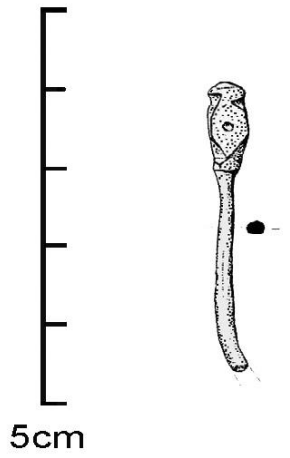

Fig 13: Baluster-headed pin, *from South Newbald (after Leahy 2000, fig 6.7.5)*

Other pins **(Fig 14).** Only a handful of pins do not fit into the groups outlined above. Fig 14a illustrates a form with 5 knops, for which four of the six examples represented come from East Anglia. Fig 14b illustrates another group, characterized by 'pineapple' decoration, and represented by just three examples (all in silver, and all from Hamwic).

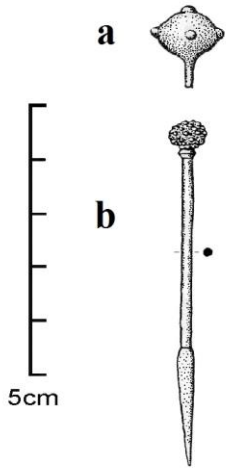

Fig 14: 'Other types': a: 'knopped', from Acton, Cheshire (after a photograph by V Oakden, PAS database no. LVPL-E759A1) b: 'pineapple'-headed, from Southampton (after Hinton 1996, Fig 8, 254/1613).

Analysis of Distribution

As would be expected, the PAS database reveals a paucity of Middle-Saxon dress accessories, including pins, in western Britain. More surprising is the observation that, with the exception of Yorkshire, few collared pins are recorded from the counties north of the Humber. The largest numbers of collared pins come from Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and East Anglia. Furthermore, in these areas, the ratio of pins: strapends is greater than 1:1 (54% pins), in contrast to central and southern areas of Britain, where the ratio is approximately 1:3 (27% pins).

Patterning in Raw Materials

Around two thirds of the collared-pin series are of copper-alloy. 1-2% are in silver, ten such examples being recorded on the PAS,

while 25 come from excavations (Fishergate, Flixborough, Hamwic) and the East Yorkshire metal-detected sites. All groups except plate-heads feature examples in silver, but 51% are of the globular-headed form. East Anglia has six of the ten silver pins on PAS (three each from Norfolk and Suffolk). Up to one third of collared pins found by excavation are of iron, many more than the number recovered via metal detecting (just 4% on the East Yorkshire metal detector sites). No doubt this is because ferrous material is often disregarded during the latter. This is clearly demonstrated at Cottam B, where both approaches were employed (Richards 1999, 77). Most iron pins are similar in form to the non-ferrous collared pin series, and appear to be of contemporary date, though they do feature some innovations in head shape.

Conclusion

The dataset used as a basis for this typochronology demonstrates that the collared pin series dominates Britain's known corpus of early-medieval pins. Within the series, a relative chronology of pinhead types is discernible, along with, the author argues, its overall date range. Mutual validation of the archives is afforded by high levels of correlation seen between artefact profiles based on specific sites and those that draw on county level data (PAS). Crucially, as far as being able to acquire dating insights is concerned, the Yorkshire dataset comprises two groups of sites: those at which activity terminated in the mid-ninth century, and those which remained active into the Anglo-Scandinavian period. The pin 'fingerprints' at each are distinctive, and comparison allows trends in pinhead morphology to be tracked across the ninth and early tenth centuries.

Within Northumbria, the florescence of both the collared pins and the major 9th-century strapend series, together with the consistent numeric relationships between these artefact forms and the styca coinage suggests that the pins are best dated to the 800s.

The PAS database reveals regional variations in both general levels of pin use, and in frequencies of particular head types. A brief overview of early-medieval pin types outwith the collared series shows considerable regional variation, but with a few exceptions, those in the collared series appear to have been in wide circulation.

Acknowledgements

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