

Viking coin is a forgery

By LORNA HUGHES

A COIN thought to provide further proof of Wirral's Viking links turned out to be an elaborate forgery.

Some of the world's leading Viking experts were taken in by the coin, which was discovered by a metal detecting enthusiast in Neston in 2005.

It was thought to be a genuine Viking coin from Olaf Guthfrithsson, King of York, dated at AD941, complete with the King's raven emblem.

The find helped reinforce already strong evidence placing the Battle of Brunanburh – the most important of Viking battles with the English – in Wirral.

The coin was catalogued and published in 2006 in the British Numismatics Journal and then widely referenced.

But Dr. Mark Blackburn of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge became suspicious when a similar coin was spotted on eBay.

Fakes no later than 19th century

He purchased the coin and sent both coins for detailed metallurgical analysis by Dr Peter Northover of Oxford University's Materials Characterisation Services.

The tests revealed that both coins were relatively recent forgeries, dating from no earlier than the 19th Century.

Wirral's Prof Steve Harding of the University of Nottingham and Dr. David Griffiths of the University of Oxford, who blog on the Wirral News website, said all they could do was "smile ruefully".

Both experts will now have to rewrite sections of their books on Viking history.

Prof Harding said: "It fooled everyone. It appeared to be an very interesting find in its own right and fitted with other important Viking pieces found nearby such as the Neston Viking cross fragments and a silver ingot found at Ness.

"Olaf Guthfrithsson was the Viking leader from Dublin who fought at the battle of Brunanburh in AD937.

"Most experts believe it took place on Wirral and it was intriguing that a coin minted four years later should pop up on Wirral.

"It is also unfortunate in that we included a whole page photograph of the coin in our new book on Viking DNA: The Wirral and West Lancashire Project!"

Dr Griffiths also refers to it in his book on the Vikings of the Irish Sea.

Prof Harding said other evidence pointing to the significant presence of Vikings in Wirral was "beyond question".

He is publishing a book on the Battle of Brunanburh later this year with Nottingham colleague Dr. Paul Cavill. He said: "The coin will definitely not be in!"



● The "Viking" coin found in Neston in 2005. Image used with permission of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; insets, the coin's reverse side; Prof Stephen Harding

Code NA

Battle was described as 'important as Hastings'

THE Battle of Brunanburh in AD937 was described by BBC historian Neil Oliver as "important as Hastings".

It "aimed to settle once and for all whether Britain would be controlled by a single Imperial power or remain several separate kingdoms.

Despite its importance in shaping the history of Britain its location has been argued about for many years, even though Brunanburh happens to be the old name for Bromborough.

Most experts – including the English Place Name Society – now believe the battle took place on Wirral.

The other place mentioned in the contemporary poem written about the battle is Dingsmere – the coastal place of escape – which Steve Harding, Paul Cavill and Judith Jesch have identified as "the mere or marshland waters associated with the "Thing" or Viking Parliament of Thingwall".

They have suggested it may be along the coastal stretch near Sheldrakes restaurant in Lower Heswall or Heswall Point.

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