

# **Museum opening exhibit of The Galloway Hoard on Saturday**

**This is a story about treasure trove. The Galloway Hoard, Scotland's earliest Viking-age hoard, was buried around 900 AD and rediscovered in 2014 on Church of Scotland land at Balmaghie in Kirkcudbrightshire by a metal detectorist.**

Now the story of the hoard, its contents and its significance are just beginning to be told with the opening of a new exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland on Saturday 29 May 2021. The exhibition will run all summer until 12 September and some more robust parts of the exhibit will then go on tour, beginning in Kirkcudbright Galleries.



The 3-D lidded vessel showing what is underneath the fragile textile wrapped around it.

The best example of the items restored is perhaps the cross which has revealed some interesting decor on it. The items were stacked in layers, it appears by design, and not simply at random.

There are more than 100 objects in the find, including 5 kg of silver bullion, some gold – the largest and most varied of Viking-age gold ever found, and textiles including the first silk to be found in Scotland. Future research might establish whether the silk came from China.



Already a 3-D model of the lidded vessel has been produced at the British Museum with the help of the Glasgow School of Art and Steven Dey of Thinksee3D Ltd. The vessel is 14cm high and 20 -12 cm wide, and held around 25 objects packed into it. The

items inside included glass beads, pendants and curios, and the vessel itself was wrapped in textile, some of which is too fragile to remove. The researchers decided to leave the textile in place and have recreated the decorations on the vessel from a kind of x-ray image of it.

The vessel is possibly the single biggest item, but others include the cluster of ribbon arm rings almost interwoven together. The thought is that the hoard is a deliberate deposit from possibly four owners, not all of whom were of equal status, but done with a lot of thought. These are “unhacked” or whole items and perhaps more elaborate than others.



Pic caption: Dr Martin Goldberg, Principal Curator, Medieval Archaeology & History at National Museums Scotland examines the 3D model of the vessel. Neil Hanna Photography

It is difficult to establish what the smallest item is as there are small fragments of metal hacked off from larger items, and microscopic pieces of gold for example on the larger blackstone pendant.

Two items which might seem insignificant may lead to some kind of religious inference. These are two balls of dirt, which are similar to some found in the Vatican collection and which included earth from the Holy Land, Jerusalem, Jordan and Bethlehem. The future multi-disciplinary research may reveal more of the unfolding story of these balls.

There are connections with Ireland, and with places much further away than that. The exhibition will tell the story as it has been uncovered so far, but the hoard does not really tell a story of everyday life, but rather a moment in time.





There is much more work to be done, but some conservation has already been carried out led by Artefacts Conservator Dr Mary Davis. Dr Davis explained to us that her work is forensic,

involving a lot of recording and analysis.

Senior Curator, early Medieval and Viking Collections, Dr Martin Goldberg, has already carried out a lot of [investigation](#), but will now work with a team of researchers in a three year project. The team will include post-doctoral researchers from the University of Glasgow, who will be trained up to investigate the items in the hoard in even more detail and setting them in a wider context. More scientific techniques will be used and other teams in various other locations, including Brussels, will apply these to the silver, gold and textiles.

Research will also be applied to the use of textiles, wondering whether the textiles used to wrap the items were literally grabbed from nearby or chosen more deliberately in a form of reverence.

This is the most significant acquisition of its type by National Museums Scotland, reflected in the success of the fundraising which allowed the conservation programme to be conducted.

Dr Martin Goldberg, Principal Curator, Medieval Archaeology & History at National Museums Scotland said: "This is only the third silver-gilt and decorated vessel to be found as part of a Viking-age hoard in the UK, and so we might have expected it to be like the other two. However, the 3D-model reveals that the vessel is not from the Carolingian (Holy Roman) Empire of continental Europe as we'd expected based on other similar examples. Instead, the decoration and design show leopards, tigers and Zoroastrian religious symbols, all of which suggest that it is a piece of Central Asian metalwork from halfway round the known world.

"Another surprise comes from radiocarbon dating of wool wrapping the vessel, which dates to AD 680-780. So, the vessel is from beyond Europe, potentially thousands of miles away,

and the wool wrapping it pre-dates the Viking Age, being more than 100 or maybe even 200 years old by the time it was buried. While the real vessel is still wrapped up in 1300 year-old cloth being kept safely in controlled environmental stores for preservation and future research, it's wonderful to be able to use 21<sup>st</sup> century technology in the exhibition to let people see what it looks like under those fragile textile wrappings.

"A unique combination of familiar objects, exotic materials and exceptional preservation makes the Galloway Hoard a fascinating find. Conservation work is allowing us to see these objects clearly for the first time, and our research so far is pointing to a new understanding of Scotland in the international context of the earliest Viking Age. This exhibition offers a rare 'snapshot', the chance to see real archaeological work in progress, both what we have learned so far and the work still to be done."

Dr Chris Breward, Director of National Museums Scotland said: "The Galloway Hoard rightly drew international attention both on its discovery and its acquisition by National Museums Scotland following a successful major fundraising campaign. I'm sure people will be fascinated to have this opportunity to see it now far more clearly, to understand its importance and to gain an insight into the amazingly detailed work that we have done and are continuing to do with it. We are excited to finally be able to show The Galloway Hoard in the National Museum of Scotland and are also greatly looking forward to bringing it to Kirkcudbright in October."

The exhibition, which is supported by Baillie Gifford, will open at the National Museum of Scotland on 29 May 2021, and will tour thereafter to Kirkcudbright Galleries (9 Oct 2021 to 10 July 2022) and Aberdeen Art Gallery (30 July to 23 October 2022) thanks to funding from the Scottish Government. Booking is essential although the exhibition is free.



