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AMAZING FACTS ABOUT ST NINIAN'S ISLE TREASURE



Dig it!

A team of Archaeology students from the University of Aberdeen were given permission to excavate an ancient church site at St Ninian's Isle, Shetland in the summers between 1955-1959



Why?

People wanted to know more about the abandoned church site and the people who lived and worshipped there a long time ago.



I've found treasure!

On the 4th July 1958, a young local school boy, Douglas Coutts joined the team. A short while later, that same day he discovered the treasure! It was one of the biggest hoards of silver treasure ever to have been discovered in Britain. What an amazing first day at a job!

Top Secret!



The Discovery

Professor Andrew O'Dell was in charge of the dig. Douglas Coutts, a young boy from Shetland called Professor Dell over after he discovered a stone slab with a Christian cross scratched on it. Below lay an amazing hoard of silver treasure. The treasure was flown to London so experts could study it more. The discovery of the treasure was top secret until it arrived in London.

How many pieces of treasure were discovered?

They are 28 pieces of silver treasure. They fit into 3 categories:

- **Feasting** - 7 bowls, 1 hanging bowl, a spoon and fork type object for eating shellfish
- **Jewellery** - 12 brooches
- **Weapons** - All the other pieces were bits from swords or other weapons

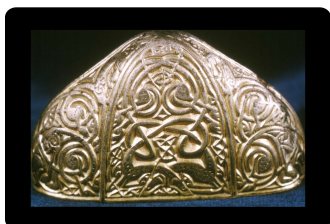


There was also a piece of a porpoise's jaw bone buried with the treasure.



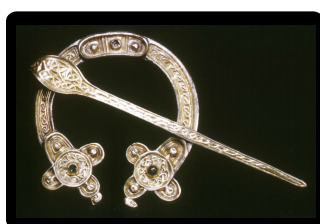
Who owned the treasure? When and why was it hidden?

Nobody really knows who owned the treasure! The treasure was possibly made at the end of the 8th century or the beginning of the 9th. Vikings were starting raiding at this time, so it may be possible the treasure was buried to keep it safe from them? Another mystery is why was it not dug up again by the owners? Were they killed, taken as slaves or ran away?



What happened next?

Once the treasure was in London, the world was told about it. It made the newspaper headlines! Shetland didn't have a museum at the time the treasure was discovered. The treasure became the property of National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.



Has the treasure ever returned to Shetland?

The treasure has been back to Shetland twice. Once in 1966 when the first Shetland Museum opened. The second time was in 2008 to mark the 50th anniversary of its discovery. It was displayed in the Shetland Museum and Archives which opened in 2007.



"We have a brilliant set of replica items on display in Shetland!"



www.shetlandmuseumandarchives.org.uk

Shetland Amenity Trust
Caring for Shetland's heritage

