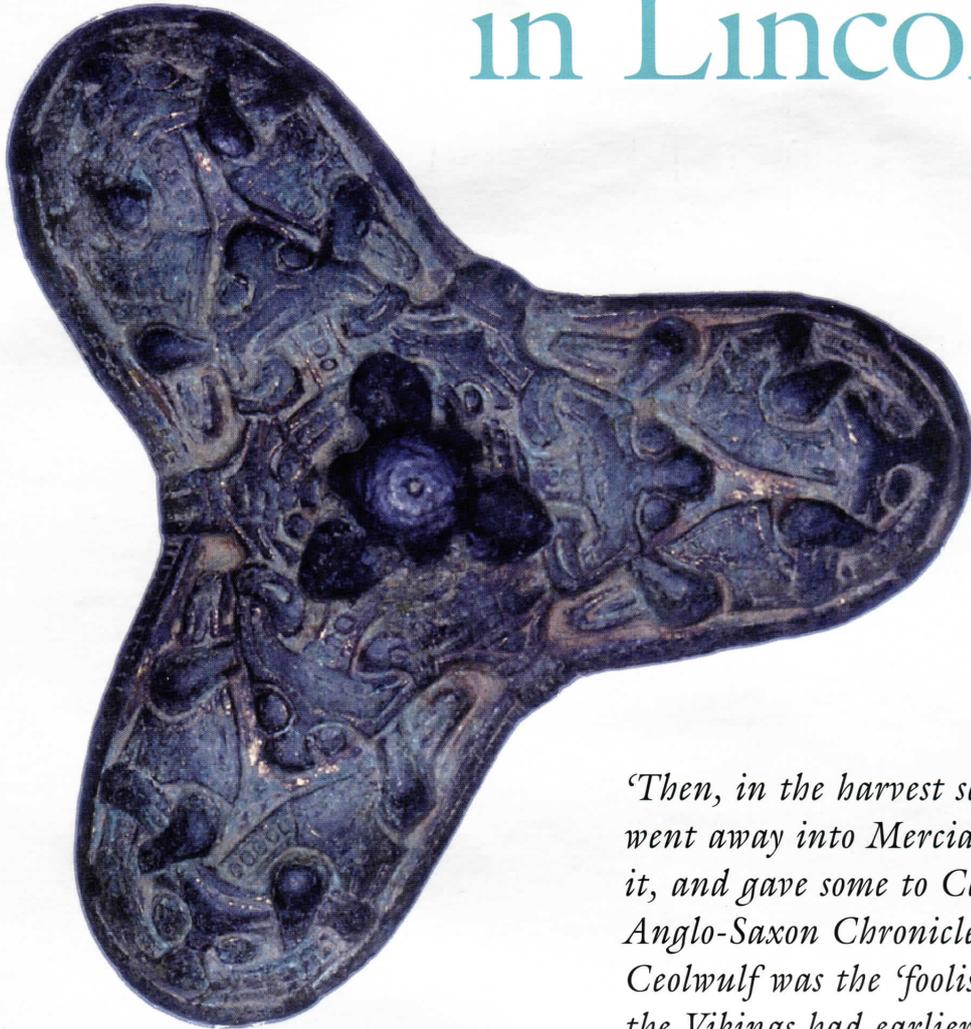
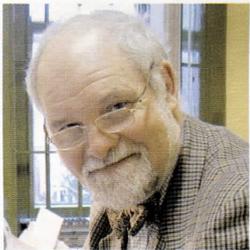


# Detecting the Vikings in Lincolnshire

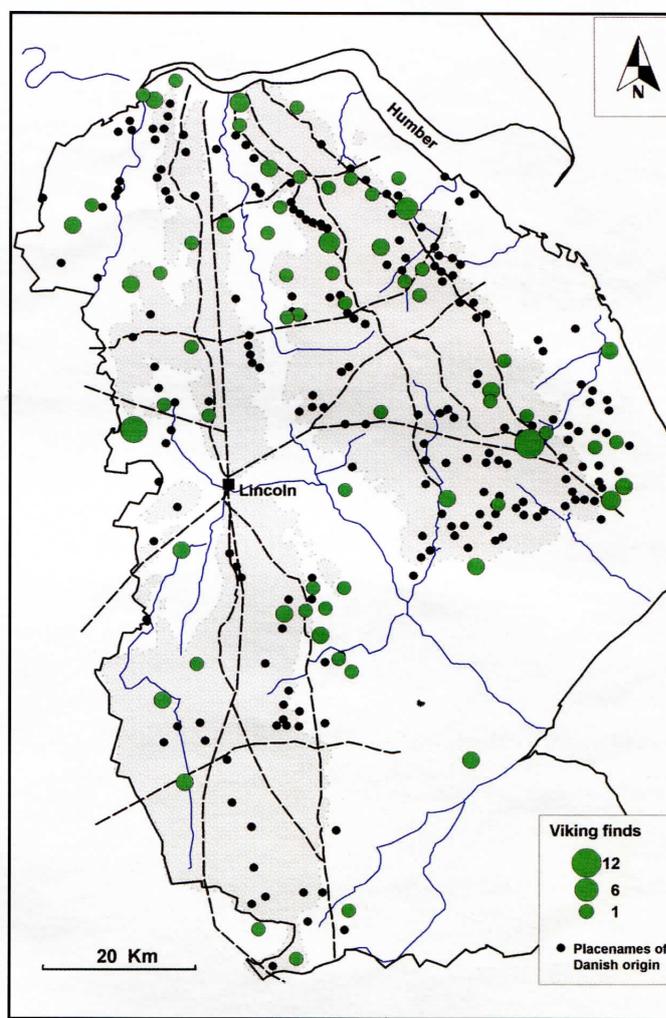
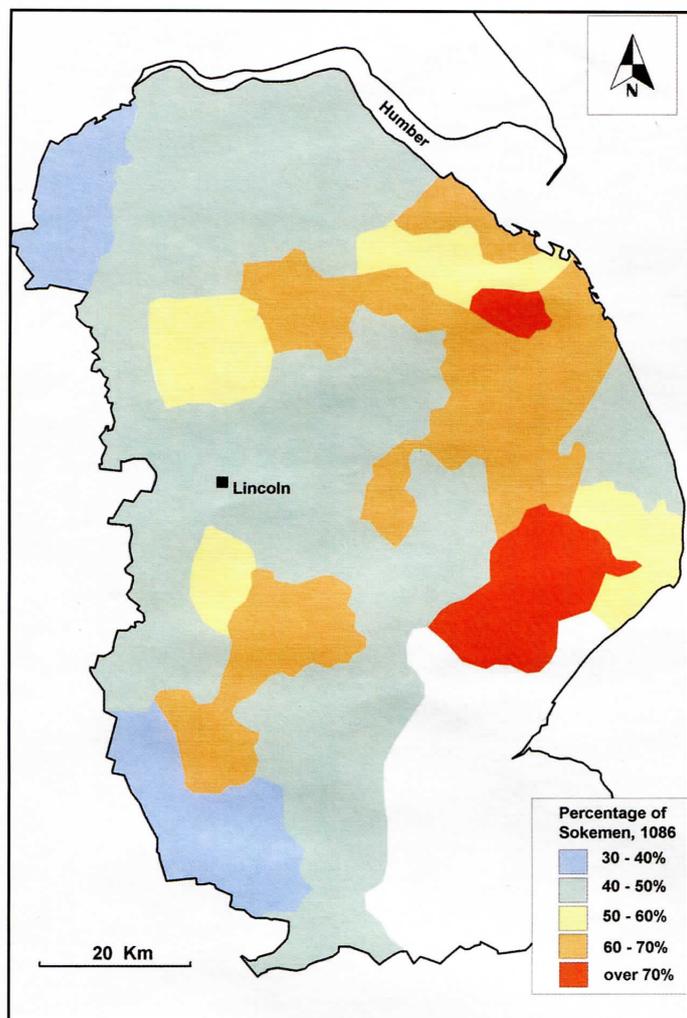


*'Then, in the harvest season, the [Viking] army went away into Mercia and shared out some of it, and gave some to Ceolwulf'. Thus says the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year AD 877. Ceolwulf was the 'foolish king's thegn' – a stooge the Vikings had earlier appointed King of Mercia. But what did this blunt statement mean to people at the time? What actually changed on the ground? Was there a migration of settlers from Scandinavia, or was it merely a change of management, with Viking lords replacing Anglo-Saxon? This has always been one of the big questions in Viking archaeology. But until recently, despite positive indications from the Domesday Book, place-names and local dialect, the almost total absence of Viking artefacts in the archaeological record made large-scale settlement seem unlikely. Now, metal-detected finds in Lincolnshire are transforming the picture.*



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*Above. A fine late ninth-early tenth century Viking brooch from Stallingborough (Lincs.) It is made from gilt-copper alloy decorated with intertwined 'gripping beasts' in a Borre style. The Stallingborough brooch was imported from Scandinavia and would have been worn by a well-to-do woman. It measures 61 mm across.*



The inclusion of Lincolnshire in the land ‘shared out’ by the Vikings is supported by a concentration of Danish place-names in the county. Of the Lincolnshire villages recorded in Domesday, 217 (29%) ended in *-by* (meaning a principal homestead, hamlet or village), and a further 66 (9%) in *-thorpe* (a secondary farm or outlying settlement). In most cases, these were combined with Danish personal names, as in Scunthorpe (‘Skúma’s farm’). Even today, the Lincolnshire dialect contains Danish words: a stream is a ‘beck’ (from *bekkr*) and an island a ‘holme’ (*holmr*). It is notable, too, that in 1066 a majority (140 out of 220) of Lincolnshire landowners had Danish names, and at Domesday the county contained an unusually high proportion of sokemen. These were peasants, most of whom had only small land-holdings, but, unlike villeins, they were free and able to dispose of their property. Sokemen averaged 54% of the Lincolnshire population, rising to over 70% in some areas – compared with less than 10% in Essex. These free peasants may have been the descendants of the men of the Great Army settled in AD 877. Despite all this evidence, however, doubts remained about whether the Viking takeover was a matter of mass migration or

*Above Left. The distribution of sokemen in Lincolnshire as recorded in the late eleventh-century Domesday survey.*

*Above right. The distribution of Scandinavian place-names and Viking finds in Lincolnshire.*

‘elite domination’.

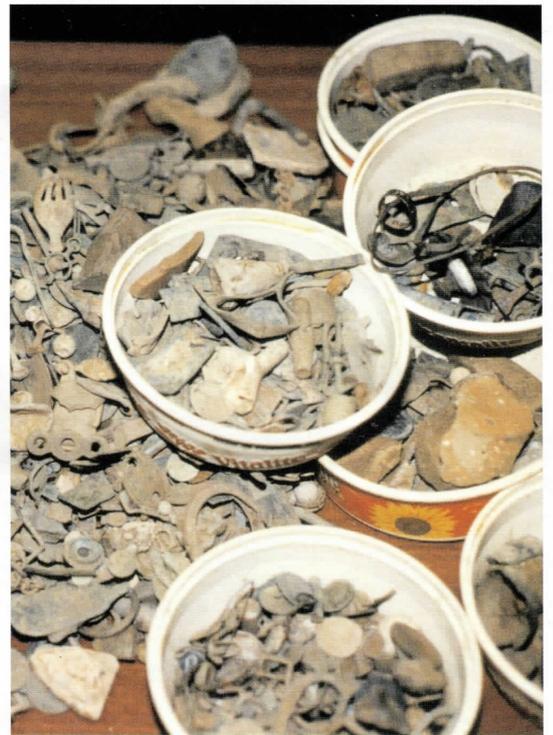
But with more than 260 metal-detected finds of Viking and Anglo-Scandinavian metalwork now recorded for Lincolnshire, a definite picture is emerging – though it is not of great warriors so much as of peasant women.

Relations between archaeologists and metal-detectorists have been bad for many years. We have all heard of sites and excavations (my own included) being raided by thieves using metal-detectors – so-called ‘nighthawks’. But this is only one side of the story, and there is much to be said for co-operation. Lincolnshire, like much of eastern England, is being heavily ploughed. A whole landscape has been destroyed in the postwar years, and we have a responsibility to record what we can from this disaster. At the North Lincolnshire Museum, we have been recording metal-detected finds for more than 25 years. For much of this time I did this as a somewhat lonely personal venture and was unpopular with many people, but, like colleagues in East Anglia, I knew that something had to be done. Now, with the Portable Antiquities Scheme in place, the recording is being carried out by Finds Liaison Officers at Scunthorpe and Lincoln, and new information is pouring in. The



*Left. Metal-detectorists at work in Lincolnshire.*

*Right. A metal-detectorist's collection of finds from South Ferriby (Lincs.).*



*Below. A silver gilt brooch from Whitton (Lincs.). This has recently gone through the treasure process and has now been acquired by the North Lincolnshire Museum. While lacking direct parallels, this brooch is of Scandinavian inspiration and may have come from Denmark or southern Sweden. It would have been worn by a woman along with a pair of larger oval brooches. Diameter 26 mm.*

Viking finds have been especially closely studied.

They are, in the main, of strikingly poor quality: cheap, mass-produced trinkets. These are not valuable objects of the kind that might move easily between cultures – through, say, high-level ‘gift exchange’. They are likely to have remained within the society that produced them. Many are small round or trefoil (three-lobed) brooches that formed part of Danish women’s dress. We also have some examples of large, finely made trefoil brooches. But big oval brooches, which are found in Scandinavia, have not so far turned up. This may be an accident of discovery – small brooches were more common and easier to lose – or it may be they were going out of fashion by the tenth century.

Until very recently there was little artefactual evidence for the presence of Viking men in Lincolnshire. A small number of buckles and strap-ends had



been found, but even these could have been worn by women. Over the last few years, however, we have seen finds of Viking sword fittings – providing evidence for the Viking stereotype! We are also seeing finds of ninth-century Irish metalwork, particularly harness fittings.

At first these were interpreted as loot from Viking raids in Ireland, but the numbers now being found may indicate the presence of Irish Vikings in the Great Army. ‘Viking’ is a job description, not an ethnic label, and we also have some place-name evidence for Irish (i.e. ‘Scottish’) settlers in Lincolnshire: Irby (‘the settlement of the Irish’), Scotton (‘the settlement of the Scots’), and Scotter (‘the tree of the Scots’).

Viking coins are rare in Lincolnshire, but there is an interesting pattern of late-ninth-century Anglo-Saxon coin finds.

Coins, which are mostly found in hoards elsewhere, usually turn up as single finds in



Lincolnshire. Were coins more widely circulated in the county, perhaps in the purses of paid-off Viking warriors? There are also some Viking silver objects, recognisable from their characteristic stamp decoration, and some bullion. Occasionally we see sections of finger-shaped silver ingots cut by a blow from a chisel. The Viking bullion economy may also be represented by weights used to measure quantities of metal. There are two main types: small, copper-alloy weights resembling dice, and crude blocks of lead into which are set pieces of Anglo-Saxon or Irish fine metal-work, or coins. These objects appear crude for the weighing of precious metal, but it is difficult to think of any other use.

None of the metal-detected finds is 'stratified' – they all come from plough-soil. But patterns are emerging in the distribution. In general the metalwork is coming from areas where there are concentrations of Danish place-names; the match is not perfect, but it is as good as can be expected in the present imperfect state of knowledge. Oddly, there are few finds of Viking metalwork from around Lincoln, which was, along with Derby, Leicester, Nottingham and Stamford, one of the five Viking boroughs. The area around the city also has few Danish place-names. But this could just be the exception that proves the rule. The rank and file of the Great Army may have settled in the

*Above left. Ringerike-style buckle from Kirmington (Lincs.). This buckle dates from the early eleventh century and shows the continuing use of Scandinavian ornament.*

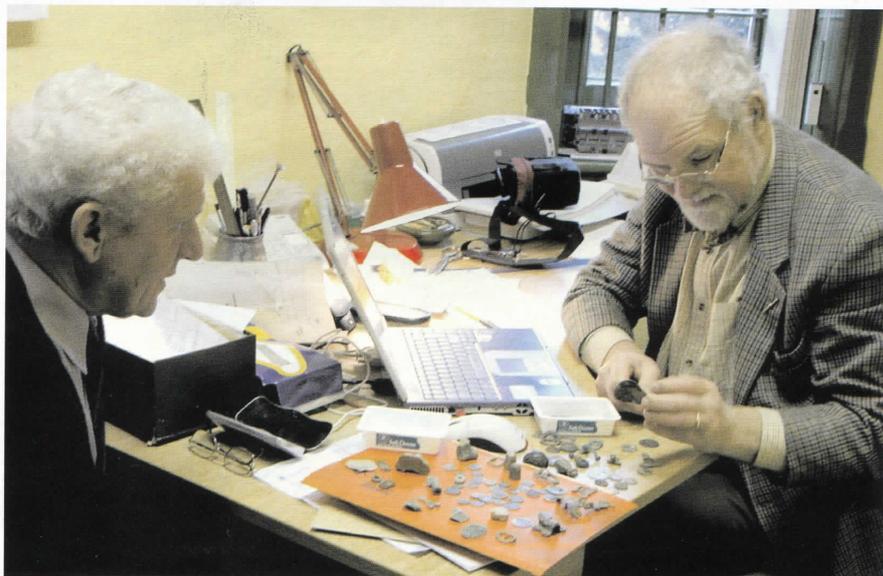
*Above middle. Quadrangular brooch from Elsham (Lincs.). These late ninth-early tenth century copper alloy brooches are found both in Scandinavia and the Danelaw.*

*Above right. Trefoil mount from Ewerby (Lincs.). The style is Viking, but this looks like the work of an Anglo-Saxon copyist unfamiliar with the design.*

*Below. Kevin Leahy (right) at work recording detector finds.*



*Above. A Ringerike-style bridle fitting from Bardney (Lincs.). The decoration consists of an animal facing left and looking backwards to bite its own tail. Behind its head is a mane made up of the hooked tendrils characteristic of the Ringerike style.*



*continued on page 468*

## *A Viking Woman at Doncaster*

Archaeologists monitoring work on two sewer pipe trenches at Adwick-le-Street near Doncaster uncovered an exceptional Viking burial in January 2001. Though the skeleton was poorly preserved, it was possible to identify the body as that of a woman of at least 33-45 years. She was buried with an iron key or latch-lifter, an iron knife, a decorated bronze bowl, and, most interestingly, a pair of oval 'tortoise' brooches.

It is the latter that command attention. They are only the fourth set to have been found in England, and the first to have been excavated in controlled conditions. The name 'tortoise' derives from the distinctive shell-like shape of the brooches, and from the fretwork design, whereby the whole surface is divided into compartments, each decorated with stylised animals or humans. Originally there would also have been little silver bosses at the crossing points of the frets. The brooches were worn in pairs on the upper breast, fastening looped straps which supported a kind of pinafore dress. Traces of the straps (and an under-tunic) were preserved by contact with the metal in the Adwick-le-Street examples.



*Above, the two tortoise brooches, and below, a detailed view of one of them showing the distinctive Viking style of decoration comprising stylised animals and figures.*



Tortoise brooches are unquestionably Scandinavian, and the new finds are the earliest known in England, probably dating to the period AD 860-900, when Norse kings based at York ruled over the old Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Northumbria. The burial may, however, be a little later in date. The brooches form a non-matching pair, as if one had replaced a lost original, and the hinge-pin support on one of them had been broken at some point and repaired. These brooches had been around for some time, it seems, before being used to dress a corpse.

Isotope analysis of the teeth of the Adwick-le-Street woman confirmed her Scandinavian origin and showed that she may have grown up in the Trondheim area of Norway. Her knife was of a type commonly found in ninth to eleventh century contexts in both Scandinavia and the Danelaw (Viking-controlled England), while her bowl, of seventh to tenth century date, was probably made in one of the Celtic areas of the British Isles - though even this could have found its way to Scandinavia and been among her possessions there.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reports the late ninth century as a period of Viking colonisation, and place-name evidence implies heavy Scandinavian settlement in parts of the Doncaster area. Now the Adwick-le-Street woman provides solid archaeological evidence to back the idea that the Vikings of the Danelaw were not just foreign overlords but included families of settlers.

*Below. Two fragments of the Adwick-le-Street woman's bronze, Celtic style bowl.*



*Above. A fragment of textile has been preserved by contact with the metal underside of a tortoise brooch.*

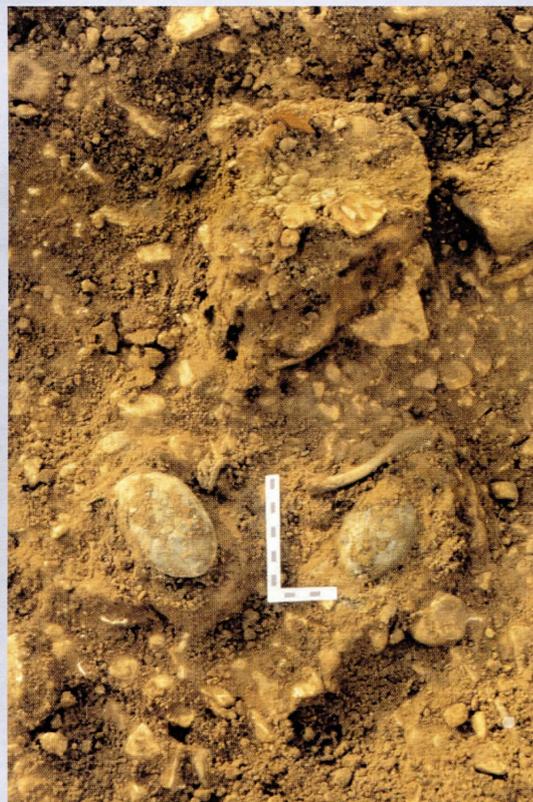
*Below right. The Viking woman as found. The two tortoise brooches still in situ on her upper breast.*

*Below. An artist's reconstruction of the Viking woman shown with her latchkey, knife, bronze bowl, and two tortoise brooches holding the straps of her pinafore dress.*



## Acknowledgements and further information

The excavation was carried out by Northern Archaeological Associates. The finds were purchased with the help of the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and are now on display at the Doncaster Museum and Art Gallery, Chequer Road (open Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm, Sunday 2pm to 5pm, admission free).





countryside, where land was ‘shared out’ to form many small estates, while it was the Viking leadership that took possession of Lincoln and the land close by. The Anglo-Saxon peasants may have remained in place here, working the land for their new masters. This might also explain the relative paucity of sokemen around Lincoln. The large rural ‘productive sites’ – rich in finds of Anglo-Saxon metalwork – all seem to end around this time: further evidence of a radical change in political control over the landscape.

As a final piece of evidence for the Vikings in Lincolnshire, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle offers this rueful comment on the inhabitants of the region in the late tenth century. Under Viking attack in AD 993 – by which time another great wave of raiding was under way – the men of the Lindsey ‘Parts’ of Lincolnshire put up a less than enthusiastic defence. Unlike the heroic defeat at Maldon two years before, this dismal event was not commemorated in epic verse, but explained away in the Chronicle with the observation that the people of Lindsey were ‘Danes on their father’s side’. The finds we are seeing suggest they may also have had Danish great grand-mothers!

The metal-detector and the systematic recording of finds are reshaping key parts of the archaeological record. Among the big developments is the emergence of once ‘archaeologically invisible’ Vikings into the light of day. This has profound implications for the old debate about whether conquest involves wholesale resettlement or simply a change of landlords. And that is a debate not just about Vikings, but also Anglo-Saxons, Romans, Celts, ‘the Beaker folk’, and many past invaders.

*Above left. A massive silver ring from Theddlethorpe (Lincs.). The style of decoration suggests the ring was made in Gotland. Too large to wear objects like this show the Vikings’ interest in silver bullion.*

*Left. A fragment of an Irish harness fitting. This could be loot, but is more likely to have belonged to an Irish warrior. ‘Viking’ was a job description, not an ethnic label, and Irish Vikings are perfectly possible. Objects like this are allowing us to fill out some of the details of what happened in AD 877.*

