

# The Staffordshire Hoard – An Inspiration

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In July 2009 Terry Herbert, a metal detectorist, discovered the find of a lifetime. Using his 14 year old metal detector he discovered one of the largest hoards of Anglo-Saxon treasure ever found in a field near the village of Hammerwich in Staffordshire. The hoard consisted of weapon decorations, helmet decorations and crosses – over 1500 items in total, in gold, weighing more than 5kgs and silver weighing 1.5kg, along with 3,500 Cloisonné garnets. Later work by archaeologists located further objects bringing the total to over 3,900 (Dean, Hooke and Jones, p. 145). The finds date from approximately 650-750 CE, although exact dating has not yet been possible. There are similarities to the objects found in the Sutton Hoo ship burial, which is dated to between 550 and 650 CE.

Many of the pieces are twisted, as if wrenched from their original mount, leading experts to believe that this was a warrior's booty (Kennedy). There were no items of feminine apparel, all items being masculine and indicative of military trappings, although Dean, Hooke and Jones (p. 145) note that there were no military strap fittings which are common in male grave goods.

## The Hoard As Inspiration

After viewing the pictures of the hoard items on the internet, and seeing some of the pieces for myself at the initial display in the British Museum, soon after it was discovered, I was inspired to create a piece of goldwork embroidery based on one of the most iconic items from the hoard. The source of my inspiration was the stylised horse/seahorse from the finds – see <http://www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk/staritems/stylised-horse>. There is some argument about whether this piece is actually a highly stylised horses head, or whether it is a fairly accurate depiction of a seahorse. According to the Birmingham Museum information some experts argue that the Anglo-Saxons tended not to portray animals particularly realistically and that it is better to regard this mount as showing a stylised horse's head. Others feel that the shape is so reminiscent of the species of seahorse that lives off the coast of Britain that the maker must really have intended to picture a seahorse.

The original piece is made with gold filigree soldered on to gold plate, and measures no more than 1.7" x 0.75", and is only 0.03" thick.

For my interpretation, I chose to make it significantly bigger than the original, so that it was practical to make with the gold wires available for couching. My interpretation of the design measured approximately 4" x 2".

In order to get a 3 dimensional quality to the embroidery, I initially started with a layer of felt, following the outline of the piece – the outline was created by taking a photo of the original, sizing it as required and tracing around it. Additional layers of felt were added for the face, to reflect the shaping of the original. This was stitched on to black ribbed silk, backed with calico.

Next gold kid was stitched over the felt for areas where the original had undecorated plate i.e. the head and fin/tail. This was then edged with gold pearl purl wire, size No. 1, couched down, and also couched around the remaining felt. The same wire was also couched along the body to form the dividers between the segments of filigree.

Next each of the filigree “spirals” was formed by couching down thinner gold pearl purl, size fine. The same fine purl pearl wire was couched over the kid to delineate the facial features.

Finally, the gaps between the filigree was filled in with small stitches using a gold embroidery thread.

The resultant embroidery is shown below. This was used to decorate a book-bag, given as a gift at the Knighting of a friend.



### **Bibliography:**

Kennedy, Maev and Allen, Paddy. Guardian Interactive Article, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009.  
Stephen Dean, Della Hooke and Alex Jones (2010). The ‘Staffordshire Hoard’: the Fieldwork. The Antiquaries Journal, 90, pp 139-152. doi:10.1017/S0003581510000107.