

Anglo-Saxon Strap End



Copper-alloy strap end c. 5th century

I set out to learn to cast, so I could make tokens to leave at Arts and Sciences displays. My research into period casting methods and materials turned up a 50 percent failure rate. In learning a new skill I felt this was too high a failure rate and it would only discourage me, so I started using modern materials. That was fairly successful, but after awhile I wanted to learn a more period approach. So I dug a pit, lined it with clay to make a furnace, carved a master from bees wax, made and fired a mold, poured pewter into lost wax casting mold and broke apart the mold. That approach was fun, but it did not yield the results I was looking for and it

was too time consuming. Back to the drawing board and more research, yielded soap stone carving. I have tried to carve objects in the past only to discover it is a lot harder than it looks. I was amazed at how easy soap stone was to carve. I am still learning to carve in the negative, so my designs are fairly simple.

The mold process I use is a three part mold. Two parts of the mold can be reused on any project as they are the pour spout or the sprue. The third part of the mold is where the design is carved. It can be reused multiple times to get a clear, crisp positive. I think that this is the path I should have started on to make tokens. I have chosen a simple strap end as my first and second carving project. (My first attempt at carving looks too modern to my eye. It can be seen on the back of my soap stone mold.) I found a picture of a fish pin from Kent. It is an unusual piece and not very well executed. It was probably a custom order piece. I liked its shape and thought it might translate into a fun strap end, as the Barony of Tir-y-Don means land by the sea.

Both the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons wore belts with strap ends. I have been researching Anglo-Saxon strap ends and who wore them. (I find the little touches that say I am a wealthy woman interesting. Pieces of metal, which serve no useful purpose other than decoration, are a way to flaunt my wealth.) I found research, which indicates scholarly circles have been debating what women wore around their waists for years. Archeological evidence has provided some answers, but nothing which is definitive. (Skeletoins are found with strap ends around their knees and small piles of objects part of the way down their thighs. Evidence that a cloth belt was probably worn.) Illuminated manuscripts are of little help, because they show women wearing loose, draped tunics. The fold lines of the fabric imply that a belt was worn, but the actual composition of the belt cannot be ascertained. It is this mystery which has intrigued me. I have tried rope belts, they tend to cut into my waist. I have tried narrow leather belts, they

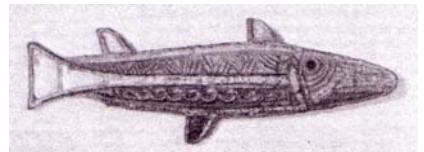
are hard to tie, but do not sag. Finally, I tried card woven belts. They are easy to tie, will support a fair amount of weight without being a problem and they have a wide enough end to attach a strap end. Archeological evidence supports most of these theories. The woven belt in the picture below is made of a vegetable fiber. "Linen, hemp or jute will not stretch and are a good choice for a belt." (Owen-Crocker, pg. 152) The next step in this project is to become a better carver and create a more detailed master.



Copper alloy Strap End, Zoomorphic style, 8th-9th century



Girdle end with textile, St. John's Cambridge (simple pattern in white, blueish-green and indigo).



Fish pin from East Kent