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## **Roman brooch find in Shetland extends ancient travel routes**

AMATEUR archaeologists may have found Britain's most northerly ancient Roman artefact, it emerged yesterday.

The fibula, or brooch, which has been dated to between 50BC and 50AD, could have belonged to an islander returning to the area around Norwick on Shetland after serving in the Roman army.

The archaeologists made the find when they were called in after bulldozers unearthed items while extending the graveyard at Norwick.

It is highly unusual to find Roman goods so far north and the item gives a revealing insight into trade routes and social mobility at the time.

Les Smith, from Lerwick, is the member of the Unst Archaeological Group who found the bronze, two-inch-long brooch.

"This was a very rare and important find. I was very surprised when I saw the flash of the object. I have a reasonable knowledge of the artefacts in the local museum but this was unlike anything I had seen before," he said.

"At first, it was difficult to say what it was. Eventually, you could see that it was very finely made. Bulldozers at the graveyard site had uncovered some Viking objects and underneath that we found the Iron Age material."

Fibulas were used as fasteners to hold clothing together. Experts at the British Museum believe the one found on Shetland, from the late Iron age/early Roman period, could have been made in Germany.

It may have been traded several times and was likely to have been regarded as a much sought-after trinket by its owner.

Ralph Jackson, curator of the Romano-British collections at the British Museum, said: "It appears to be a Roman fibula and if that is correct, it is very interesting as they aren't normally seen in that part of the world.

"A fibula is a term given to a particular type of brooch. It is occasionally likened to a safety pin and consists of a spring and catch plate.

The Roman army occupied parts of southern Scotland at the end of the first century AD before units were transferred to the Danube, leading to the building of defences such as the Hadrian and Antonine walls.

Roman legions marched north several times, occasionally defeating the northern warriors but never fully subjugating them.

Dr Alan Leslie, director of the Glasgow University archaeological research division, said: "The brooch gives an indication of the extensive trading networks at the time.

"It could have been used as something to barter with and is certainly a very special find. There was substantial seaborne mercantile activity but it could have got there via other agencies. The Roman army was established in different areas and shifted about a lot. There were legionaries who were Roman citizens and auxiliary units from allied or conquered countries. Someone could join the army, serve their 25 years, and then move back to their locality."

Owen Cambridge, an archaeologist from Shetland Amenity Trust, who assisted the Unst group during the excavation, said: "It was fantastic that it was an amateur team of archaeologists who made the find. It is also good because in Shetland, we are often thought of as Orkney's poor neighbour in archaeological terms."