

Celtic Armlet pays for Museum Repairs

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The Bronze Age armlet which Inverness Museum is keen to acquire because it was found at Achvraile, Rogart, was sold by its owners, the Sutherland Trust, to pay for repairs and restoration of Dunrobin Castle's museum.

Though the Royal Scottish Museum was given first option to buy the 600 BC armlet, they received instead, on a long term loan from the Sutherland trust, the famous "Helmsdale Hoard" treasure and a man's shirt of 2000 years ago.

An intriguing tale of ancient treasure emerged this week when it was disclosed that Inverness District Council had applied to the Board of Trade to prevent the Achvraile armlet being exported by a London dealer, who had acquired it at Christie's Auction Rooms in July for £70,000.

Lord Strathnaver, a member of the Sutherland Trust, said this week: "I don't want people to think that we were disposing of a priceless treasure abroad. We approached the Royal Scottish Museum, but they could not come up with the sum of money we needed to refurbish our own museum, so then we offered it on the open market. As a form of consolation, the Trust offered the Royal Scottish Museum the long-term loan of other items of great historic value."

The Celtic armlet of bronze was found at the beginning of this cen-

tury by archaeologists working for the Duke of Sutherland. It recently belonged to the Countess of Sutherland, who gifted it to the Sutherland Trust, the body set up to look after the fabric and contents of Dunrobin Castle. The Trustees were looking for one single item of which they could dispose to pay for the complete refurbishment of the dilapidated museum in the grounds of the castle.

Christies valued the armlet at between £30,000 and £80,000 last year. It was too valuable to display in the Castle museum on its own, so the Trustees decided it should be offered for purchase to the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh.

Instead, the Museum has acquired the loan of the "Helmsdale Hoard." This consists of five brass plates and two strainers which was dug up from a grave when the railway was being pushed through a cutting towards Helmsdale in 1870. The items are at least 2000 years old. The Museum was also given a man's bodywarmer or shirt, again about 2000 years old, which was dug out of a Sutherland bog.