

## TREASURE ACT 1996

### SILVER FINGER RING FROM HAVERFORDWEST, PEMBROKESHIRE [Treasure Receipt No. 14.8]

#### *Introduction*

On 11 March 2014 Mr Alun John Rees of Milford Haven discovered a finger ring at Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire. The finger ring was received by Mark Lodwick, Portable Antiquities Officer for Wales on 16.6.14. The ring has been retained by the Department of History & Archaeology, National Museum Cardiff, on behalf of H.M. Coroner for Pembrokeshire.

#### *Circumstances and context of discovery*

The ring was found with the aid of a metal detector at a depth of about 15cm ('6 inches') on cultivated land occupied by Mr E. Goodridge of Haverfordwest. The grid reference for the ring and addresses of finder and owner are provided on the Treasure Receipt form.

#### *Description*

The reported object is a silver signet ring with a circular bezel with an engraved central device in the form of a merchant's mark (comprising an encircled cross above interlaced cross stems, between small quatrefoils), within a single rope/indented border. One shoulder is engraved with a tau cross, and a slight depression below may be the remains of a motif. The hoop is slightly distorted, and the shoulder with the tau cross has severe surface scratching. There is a slightly golden colour within border indents which may be gilding, but this is difficult to verify without cleaning.

Internal diameter 22.4mm ; maximum bezel width 12.3mm x 14.8; minimum hoop width 7mm; minimum hoop thickness 1.8mm; weight 13.28g.

The ring has not undergone any cleaning or conservation.

#### *Metal Content*

To judge from its colour and weight and visual comparison with other silver finger rings in the collections of the Department of History & Archaeology, the alloy is well in excess of 10% silver.

#### *Summary and conclusions*

In terms of design and style of the iconography, the ring is probably of fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century date.

A close parallel to the shoulders occurs on the shoulders of the gold episcopal ring of Richard Mayo, Bishop of Hereford (1504-1518; Merewether 1844, 249; Cherry 1995, 151-52). Its shoulder are engraved with a tau-shaped cross filled with green enamel and below it a small engraved bell, while the inside of the ring bears the inscription

*ave maria* (Cherry 2003, 371). The putative depression on the Haverfordwest ring may be the ghost of a similar devise (worn away), though it might result from poor casting. The tau became associated with St Anthony, and Mayo's tau cross may have represented a continuing connection with Antonine hospitals which devoted themselves mostly to the treatment of the disease known as St Anthony's fire, or *ignis sacer* (also known as *erysipelas*; Husband 1992, 25; Cherry 2003, 152), as well as being invoked against plague. In 1995, there were twenty-five rings known from England or in English collections bearing the tau cross on shoulder or hoop, and sixteen of those listed are signet rings (Cherry 1995). All are fifteenth or early sixteenth century, coinciding with the popularity of the Antonines from the mid-fifteenth century to the early sixteenth century.

This is not the first tau cross ring to be found in Wales. A massive fifteenth-century gold signet engraved with a Lombardic R within a Gothic border, and tau crosses on the shoulders, was found about 1870 in the garden of a small town house in Abergavenny (Octavius Morgan 1873, 51). Tau crosses include those in the British Museum (Dalton 1912, nos 528, 530, 592), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (*Fortnum Collection*, 329), and V&A collection (Oman 1930, no. 542), and it is possible that some of the rings belonged to persons who were connected with the orders under the patronage of St Anthony.

For monograms on fifteenth-century and early sixteenth-century finger rings, see Dalton 1012 (nos 431, 432, 559).

It is my opinion that as an object which has at least 10 per cent by weight precious metal, and which is at least 300 years old, this item is Treasure under Section 1 (1) (a) of the Treasure Act 1996.

Haverfordwest Museum is interested in acquiring the item for its collections.

### *References*

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Husband, T. B. 1992, 'The Winteringham Tau Cross and Ignis Sacer', *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 27, 19-35.

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