

TREASURE ACT 1996

SILVER THIMBLE FRAGMENT FROM WISTON COMMUNITY, PEMBROKESHIRE

[Treasure ref. no. 20.07]

Introduction

On the 4th June 2020 Mr Jake Webster found a silver thimble fragment whilst metal detecting in Wiston Community, Pembrokeshire. On 26th June 2020 he reported the find to H.M. Coroner for Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire and subsequently deposited it with Adam Gwilt of Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales on 11th September 2020, where it has been retained for reporting.

Circumstances and context of discovery

The thimble fragment was discovered by Mr Webster in Wiston Community in a field under pasture, at a depth of 4-5 inches. Further details including find spot information, landowner and OS co-ordinates are subsequently recorded in the Treasure Receipt form.

Description

The reported object is a domed crown or top from a silver thimble. Originally circular in shape, it is now misshapen and sub-circular in plan. The rough edges are indicative of it once forming part of a whole thimble, soldered to a sheet metal wall which is now lost. At the apex is a circular panel or cartouche with a plain field and central engraved motif, encircled by a plain linear border. The motif is a stylised acorn with cap, nut, and stalk with two leaves. A 'branch' protrudes from underneath the cap, either side of the nut. The cap is decorated with a crosshatch pattern and six short vertical incised lines or dashes along the top part of the nut. There are three or four sets of short, incised dashes in sets of 2, 3 and 4 set at regular intervals from the edge of the circular border (another possibly obscured by damage). Four horizontal rows of engraved indentations in the form of brickwork pattern, running the object's circumference, beneath which is a plain band engraved with a loose repeating key pattern. The internal surface is plain.

Measurements

Height: 7.1 mm

Width: 16.7 x 11.7 mm

Wall thickness: 0.3 mm

Cartouche diameter: 10.0 x 9.8 mm

Weight: 1.4 g

Metal Content

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

Summary and conclusions

The object, although incomplete, can be dated to the 17th century, based on its form and decorative style. The form of indentations in a brickwork or woven style set in rows, is generally attributed to thimbles of seventeenth-century date, observed on silver examples found at Lambourne, Essex (TAR 2014, no. T253), a possible Dutch import, from Shorwell, Isle of Wight (TAR 2017, no. T0567) and Healaugh, North Yorkshire (TAR 2015, no. T199).

Other similar decorative traits seen on the Wiston example, including the engraved top and loose key pattern along the bottom edge are noted on the Lambourne thimble. Thimbles with decorated tops, often adorned with geometric patterns or engraved motifs are also attributed to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with thimbles of medieval date most commonly carrying only indentation patterns. Examples from Heathayes, Devon (TAR 2016, no. 0832), Chippenham, Wiltshire (TAR 2015, no. T527), Greenhithe, London (ibid, no. T745) and a copper-alloy example from Pentridge, East Dorset (DOR-43A55E) all include this feature.

Thimbles of two-piece construction, with a rounded top soldered to a sheet metal body, are considered to have been developed in the Netherlands in the 1600s and adopted in England at a similar time. This style appears to have fallen out of fashion by the eighteenth century.

No parallel could be found for the acorn motif. There are several decorative devices dating from the medieval and post-medieval period that feature an acorn design, such as the cast copper-alloy tankard fitting from Stapleford, Wiltshire (SUR-F59935) and numerous strap-ends with acorn knop terminals as from Swinhope, Lincolnshire (NLM-B97152) and Crondal, Hampshire (SUR-E1100D). A small number of medieval thimbles (twelfth- to fourteenth century date), principally of copper alloy are termed 'acorn cup' type thimbles, based on their resemblance to an acorn cup.

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, it is treasure under Section 1 (1) (a) of the Treasure Act 1996.

Narberth Museum has expressed an interest in acquiring this item for its collections

Bibliography

Foreman, M (2021) *NLM-B97152: A MEDIEVAL STRAP END* Web page available at: <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/1044650>

Hayward Trevarthen, C (2016) *DOR-43A55E: A POST MEDIEVAL THIMBLE* Web page available at: <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/768631>

Maslin, S (2022) *SUR-F59935: A POST MEDIEVAL TANKARD* Web page available at: <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/1054390>

Maslin, S (2022) *SUR-E1100D: A MEDIEVAL STRAP END* Web page available at: <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/1054216>

TAR 2014, *Treasure Annual Report 2014* (British Museum, London)

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