

The West Yorkshire Hoard

In 2012 the society awarded grants totalling £7,000 to Leeds Museums and Galleries towards the purchase of a group of rare and wonderful archaeological artefacts. The society also linked up with the Friends of Leeds Museums to front a fundraising campaign which raised over £14,000 from the public towards the £171,000 needed to secure this treasure for Leeds.

In September 2008 a metal detectorist working alone in a field just outside Leeds happened upon one of the most significant archaeological discoveries in Leeds for many years. He had, quite literally, struck gold. He had found a small hoard of jewellery and other precious items dating back some 1300 years. Comprising four complete gold finger rings, part of a gold cloisonné brooch, a piece of gold ingot, and a lead spindle whorl, the hoard represents a highly significant and important group of Early Medieval gold objects seldom found in this part of Yorkshire. The objects all date from the 7th to 11th centuries and yet the state of preservation of these items is excellent and the workmanship is of the finest quality.

The four rings are extraordinary, demonstrating beautiful examples of Anglo-Saxon craftsmanship. The most spectacular ring has a large, lozenge-shaped bezel set with a garnet gemstone. It shows little sign of wear and was in all likelihood a piece owned by someone of high status such is its quality and value. Another, also in almost perfect condition, is decorated with gold filigree and



pellets, while a third boasts decoration of flora and fauna in niello (a black mixture of copper, silver, and lead sulphides used as an inlay). This ring shows much more wear suggesting it may have been regularly worn. The fourth ring is unusually large and has a bezel decorated with intricate spirals and twists of gold wire and granules.

There is something of an enigma about this group of items; their condition shows that some pieces in the hoard had evidently survived for a long time before being buried and yet their style and decoration suggest a huge span of time between their manufacture. The brooch has been dated at 7th century, the rings are later, perhaps between the 9th and 11th centuries and yet even though there are some 400 years between them, they were found together. This period is the time when the Vikings were active in the area and there are suggestions that this hoard may have been assembled by Vikings for the purpose of reworking – or could they be stolen goods? The burial site seems to have been disturbed and pieces of gold broken from the ingot and brooch suggesting a thief returning to his hoard, maybe to realise a bit of the value of his stash. Truth is, we will never know, but that is part of the incredible magic of a find like this.

The hoard is currently on temporary display in Leeds City Museum and in 2013 a new permanent display is being prepared alongside some thorough research into this most rare of finds for Leeds.

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