

Medieval gold finger ring 1400-1500AD

This gold finger ring was found by a metal detectorist in June 2018 in the parish of Godshill, Isle of Wight. Dating from 1400-1500 AD the ring depicts St Margaret of Antioch spearing a dragon through the mouth.



The upper face has the image of St Margaret and the outside of the hoop has six evenly spaced bands which are inscribed with the phrase: **per/ne/s/en/g/re**.



The phrase 'prenes en gré' (accept with gratitude) dates to the 15th century. It is found in a poem by the French poet, *Christine de Pisan*: 'prenez en gré le don de votre amant' (*accept with gratitude the gift of him who loves you*); this was a popular choice for betrothal or wedding gifts.



An impression of the outside of the rings hoop. The lettering is clearly visible.



The finger ring is inscribed on the upper face with an image of St Margaret of Antioch spearing a dragon through the mouth.

St Margaret of Antioch 289-304AD

During the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian (284–305), the prefect (high official or magistrate) *Olybrius*, was attracted to a beautiful young woman named *Margaret*. He wanted to make her his wife.



Margaret was not interested in his offer and no threats of punishment could succeed in changing her mind. Infuriated, Olybrius had her brought before him in a public

trial at Antioch*. Threatened with death unless she rejected her Christian faith, she continually refused to worship the gods of the Roman Empire.

Margaret was forced to face terrible trials and tortures. One describes how Satan, disguised as a dragon swallowed Margaret alive. Using her faith and with her cross she escaped the dragon spearing it through its mouth.

St Margaret of Antioch is often associated as the patron saint of expectant mothers and was one of the most venerated saints during the medieval period. Her voice was among those said to have been heard by *St Joan of Arc*.

The cult of St Margaret began to gain popularity in England during the Anglo-Saxon period. Hundreds of images and stories of her life are known to have been made, and over two hundred churches were dedicated to her, many in the Solent/Sussex region.

Many items of jewellery can be associated with Margaret, including the gold ring in our collection. In company with the many hundreds of local Welsh saints, St Margaret took her place alongside the *Virgin Mary*, *Katherine of Alexandria*, *Mary of Egypt*, *Mary Magdalene* and her sister *Martha*, as an important focus for veneration in Wales.

A 15th century 'cywydd' (metrical poem) to St Margaret suggests that the saint from Antioch lies buried at Llanfaches near Caerwent (Gwent). This shows just how closely these saints could become integrated into the local landscape.

Buched Margred, a Middle Welsh 'Life' of Margaret, tells of her suffering an appalling set of tortures before being swallowed by the devil disguised as a dragon. Happily she emerges unharmed when the crucifix around her neck miraculously grows and splits the dragon in two.

The image of St Margaret along with St Catherine, was the most frequently embroidered female saint during the Middle Ages.

In 1969 Margaret's feast day, formerly 20 July, was removed from the revised calendar of the Roman Catholic Church because it is doubtful whether she ever existed.

* Antioch was an ancient Greek city on the eastern side of the Orontes River. Its ruins lie near the modern city of Antakya, Turkey, to which the ancient city lends its name.



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The medieval gold finger ring was found by a metal detectorist in June 2018. To comply with the Treasure Act 1996 it was reported by the finder to *Frank Basford*, the Finds Liaison Officer for the Isle of Wight. Finds recorded with the Scheme help advance knowledge of the history and archaeology of England and Wales.

The Isle of Wight Heritage Service raised funds to acquire the ring and wish to thank the Arts Council England / V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Art Fund for grants towards its purchase.

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