

## NOTES

### A CACHE OF BRONZE FINGER-RINGS FROM AMERSHAM

A collection of six rings said to have been found near Amersham was recently presented to the writer. As the group is clearly of interest, it has now been given to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Department of Antiquities).

Although subsequent enquiries by Mike Farley have confirmed that the rings were indeed found in metal detecting activities in the area, it has not proved possible to pinpoint the exact site of the discovery or to establish its context. The fact that there are a number of rings all of a somewhat unusual late Roman type and in similar physical condition is suggestive of a cache, and leads this enquirer to wonder whether it might not have contained other objects such as coins. It is evident that there is a real loss to knowledge here, and this note can do no more than discuss the rings themselves and attempt to date them on the basis of iconography and style. In all cases the hoop is incomplete, as the drawings show. The devices are cut in intaglio, and are described as they appear on the rings, rather than in impression. The dimensions given are of the bezel.

1. Circular bezel. 12 x 12mm.  
The device presents two confronted male figures. Between them are two club-like objects one above the other, with a compass point between them. There is a beaded border.
2. Ovoid bezel. 10 x 9mm.  
Male bust to left. The subject raises an arm before his face, rather stylised with hand not clearly differentiated. He has a distinctive 'crew-cut' coiffure.
3. Ovoid bezel. 9 x 8mm.  
Bust to left (sex uncertain). One arm is raised before face as last example; another appears behind head.
4. Circular bezel. 12 x 12mm.  
Eagle stands to front; head to left; wings displayed; line border surrounding.

5. Circular bezel. 12 x 12mm.  
Bird (?dove) stands to left. In the field two parallel grooves above and two below. In the centre of the bird a compass point. Line border surrounding.
6. Circular bezel with two short projections on either side and also flanking the junction of hoop and bezel—eight in all. 13 x 13mm.  
A *bucranium* hung with garlands(?). In the centre a compass point. Line border surrounding.

All the rings have plain hoops apart from Nos. 5 and 6 which have a marked thickening at the shoulder. In addition, of course, there are the spoke-like projections of No. 6. There is no doubt that the general form of the rings with their raised circular bezels is late Roman (Henkel 1913, 245 nos. 1001-10 and 1866-8). The beaded border of No. 1 may be compared with that of the gold ring from Brentwood, Essex in the British Museum, where just such a border surrounds a Chi-Rho (Johns 1985), while both the beaded border and the projections of ring No. 6 are to be seen on the bezel of a bronze ring from a late fourth-century context in the villa on Moor Park golf course (publication forthcoming in *Hertfordshire Archaeology*). Indeed, the close resemblance between the bezels of the Moor Park ring and the Amersham rings, especially No. 6, found within comparatively few miles of each other, may hint at a common source in Verulamium or its region.

With regard to iconography, that of ring No. 1 may be compared with one from Vindonissa (Henkel 1913, 94 no. 1009) showing two soldiers, one on either side of an altar, although the device on the Swiss ring is cut in a more regular style. Ultimately it is reminiscent of the *Gloria Exercitus* coin type of the 330's depicting two soldiers and a standard, which may have provided the model (Robertson 1982, 259 and Pl. 62, no. 7). As for No. 2, the style of the head brings to mind those on a gold ring from

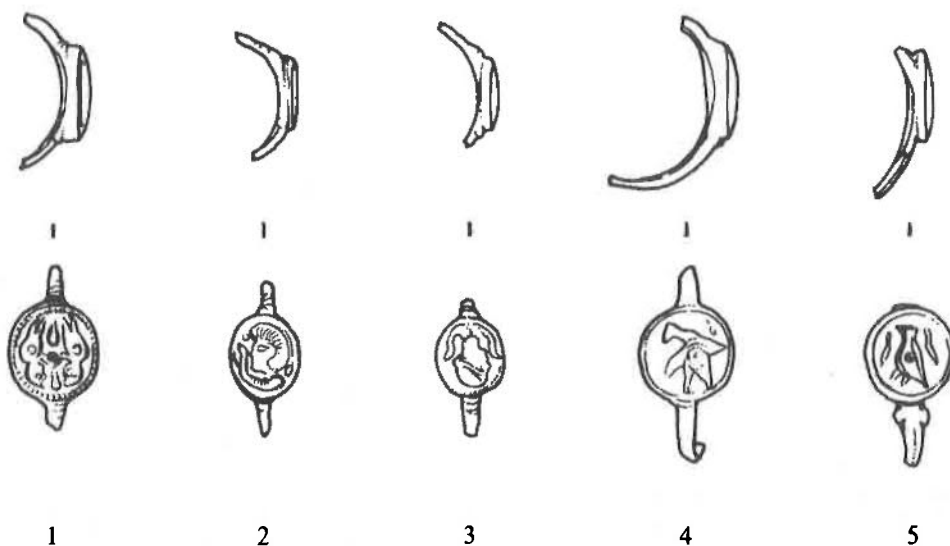


Fig. 1. Bronze finger-rings from Amersham (1:1).

Brancaster, Norfolk inscribed VIVAS IN DEO (Henig 1978, 280 no. 790), which I have recently been tempted to assign to the fifth century. Even closer is the repousse bust with raised hand, and a Chi-Rho in the field upon a bronze roundel from Richborough, Kent, said by Mattingly to be Magnentius, though on highly uncertain grounds and equally rashly identified as a high cleric of c.450 by Professor Delbruech (Bushe-Fox 1948, 140 and Pl. XLII no. 171). A bust with hand raised and holding a globe is to be seen on bronzes of Constans (Robertson 1982, 294 and Pl. 66 nos. 37 and 39). These are dated to 348-50. Although it is not certain that these particular coins provided the model, it is not impossible and if so provides a *terminus post quem* of 350 for the cache.

Birds such as those on nos. 4 and 5 frequently occur on late Roman rings, for example on a bronze signet-ring from Cirencester (Henig 1979). The theme of the Moor Park ring is, incidentally, two birds and a palm. While bird

No. 4 is surely an eagle, the other resembles a dove and might have a Christian significance like the bird on one of the silver Chi-Rho rings found in Fifehead Neville, Dorset (Henig 1978, 280 no. 795). However, the *bucranium* device of ring No. 6 (if that is what it is) appertains to pagan sacrifice!

This group of rings, then, belongs to the latter part of the Roman period in Britain; like the three silver Amesbury rings (Henig 1978, 281 nos. 801-3), they bear witness to a changing aesthetic, a more stylised approach to representing human and animal figures than had previously been the case. It is very much to be hoped that other rings of Moor Park/Amersham type will be discovered in excavated contexts.

For help of various kinds I am indebted to Mike Farley, Jack Ogden, P. D. C. Brown, and above all to Pat Jacobs for providing the drawings.

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### THE CHALFONT ST PETER 'MARS'

This note draws attention to two copper-alloy figurines, apparently identical to the example found near Chalfont St Peter and discussed by R. A. Hall (1978). One of these is actually in the collection of the Buckinghamshire County Museum, and formerly belonged to F. G. Gurney; the other belongs to the Rijksmuseum G. M. Kam at Nijmegen, where it is classed as a forgery (Zadoks-Josephus Jitta, Peters and Witteveen 1973, 45 no. ii).

The description given by Hall can be taken as accurate for all three representations. We have here a nude male figure, clad only in a helmet and a baldric and holding a human head in his left hand and an animal head in his right hand. While the subject of warriors holding the severed heads of enemies is known in Etruscan and Roman Republican art (cf. the gems, Maaskant-Kleibrink 1978, 96-7 no. 64; 103 no.

75) and may have provided the 'inspiration' in the present case, the type is not easy to reconcile with known Roman Imperial figurines portraying Mars from Britain or other provinces. Moreover, the lumpy and unattractive texture of the casting, the useless baldric (where is the sword?), and the insubstantial circular base argue strongly against these figurines being true antiquities. The present writer would suggest a date in the first half of the nineteenth century, when neo-classical taste was still strong. It is more likely that they were ornaments for the mantelpiece than true forgeries intended to deceive the collector.

I am most grateful to Mr M. E. Farley for information about the County Museum example, and for suggesting that I write this note.

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### CHOLESBURY-CUM-ST LEONARDS: A MODERN PERAMBULATION OF ANCIENT BOUNDARIES

The civil parish of Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards was created in 1934 by the union of the parishes of Cholesbury and Hawridge with the hamlets of St Leonards and Buckland Common; but the newest parish in Buckinghamshire inherited or acquired some of

the oldest boundaries. These four hilltop villages were secondary settlements from townships in the Icknield belt, the chapelry of St Leonards (Blackmere)<sup>1</sup> having been settled from Aston Clinton, Buckland Common from Buckland, and Cholesbury from Drayton

Beauchamp, while Hawridge was treated as a detached dependency of Marsworth as late as the Ship Money returns of 1635<sup>2</sup>.

The older estates along the Ickfield Way 'parishes al in a string'<sup>3</sup> had appropriated adjoining strips of the high Chilterns, and townships which failed to do so sometimes succeeded in obtaining detached areas of woodland and waste farther down the dip-slope of the Chiltern plateau. These shares in the Chiltern hinterland were needed for timber, as this became scarce around the older settlements, and also for animal husbandry. The limited areas of open downland on the escarpment were grazed by sheep, and would not otherwise have remained open; the nearer woodlands provided timber, the remoter ones swine pasture, and the heathlands were used for common grazing in the summer. These arrangements seem to have been formalized in Mercia during the 8th century. In 825 the bishop and community of Worcester refused permission for the *swangerefan* (reeves in charge of swineherds) to drive swine farther into the wood called *Scirhylte* than was permitted by the ancient rights settled in Æthelbald's time<sup>4</sup>—thus, not later than 757, apparently a limit of Mercian legal memory. The legal position would have been the same for their Chiltern holdings<sup>5</sup> and for Icknield estates generally, but here the southern boundary of the Vale parishes had the character of a frontier, separating the *Cilternsæte* from Middle Saxon land. The inner Chilterns, though heavily wooded, did not become a royal forest; the rights of the chase were exercised by the city of London, as in Middlesex and Surrey<sup>6</sup>.

This frontier between the Three Hundreds of Aylesbury and the Chiltern Hundreds, which is still (1985) the southern boundary of Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards, seems to have been established not later than the early 8th century, by agreement between the rulers of Mercia (overlords of the *Cilternsæte* from c.650)<sup>7</sup> and the kings of Essex, who controlled London and its Chiltern hinterland<sup>8</sup>. Such an arrangement could perhaps go back to the early 7th century, but at this stage the Middle Saxons

of the Thames Valley were probably separated from the *Cilternsæte* by a wide belt of forest with an unsubdued British population. By 672-4, however, Frithuwold was sub-king in Surrey<sup>9</sup> as well as at Aylesbury.

The north-eastern boundary of Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards is the county boundary of Hertfordshire; it is probably of early 10th-century origin, following one of the 'white roads up adirt the hills'<sup>10</sup>. Tring is one of the three 'ridings' (ON *bridjungr*) of the triple hundred of Dacorum (genitive plural of *Dacus* 'a Dane')<sup>11</sup> which from its name must have originated when the Danelaw boundary was settled; not, however, as early as the treaty of 886, which fixed that boundary farther east<sup>12</sup>.

For some centuries the four hilltop villages have been more closely linked with each other than with their mother parishes, and their urban centre has been Chesham rather than Aylesbury. In 1858 Cholesbury and Hawridge were transferred from the detached part of the petty sessional division of Cottesloe to the newly-formed Chesham division of Burnham; they are therefore placed by Sheahan (1862)<sup>13</sup> in Burnham hundred, although by that time the petty sessional divisions were losing their historic identification with the hundreds. After the abolition of the hundred courts in 1867 such changes could be made more readily, and were not regarded as changing the hundred boundaries.

The county review of 1934 placed the new parish in Amersham rural district, and defined its north-western boundary as Grim's Ditch. This ancient tribal frontier had been largely ignored during the scramble for the high Chilterns, and had therefore not previously served as a parish boundary along most of its length, though there was one medieval precedent: it had been adopted as such when The Lee was separated from Wendover to serve as the upland holding of Weston Turville. The pre-English origin of this earthwork was recognised by its attribution to Grim, a by-name of Woden, and probably also by the name Wallens Bank applied to the Ditch in Pitstone<sup>14</sup>; *walena* is an irregular genitive

plural of *walh* 'Briton, Welshman', twice evidenced in the post-Conquest Canterbury interpolations in the A-text of the Chronicle s.a. 607 (the E-text has *walana* s.a. 605)<sup>15</sup>. The adoption of Grim's Ditch as a simple and convenient boundary entailed the transfer of Drayton Wood from Drayton to Cholesbury, but part of it called Priest Grove had anciently been Cholesbury glebe<sup>16</sup>.

In 1974 Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards became part of the Chiltern District, and in the same year the writer was invited by his colleague Ernest Collier, the first representative of the parish on the new District Council, to take part in the decennial beating of its bounds. Of some sixty who went round, all but three were parishioners. At the conclusion of the perambulation refreshments were provided in Cholesbury village hall, and Councillor Collier observed the excellent custom of recapitulation. His address, written down from recollection the same evening, was substantially as follows, words in square brackets being editorial additions:

Before we go home, it would be a good thing to go over the bounds again, for the benefit of those who did not come all the way. We began in Shire Lane at the top of Cholesbury Bottom, and cut a cross to mark our boundary with Tring parish in Dacorum. Then we went down along the bottom of the common as far as the road, and then up and across the ploughed field to Heath End [on the edge of the former Wigginton Common], from Heath End to the cross-roads and down the road to John's Lane where we leave Hertfordshire and meet Ashley Green parish, then still down the road to Nut Hazel Cross in the Vale [Chesham Vale] where we cut the cross. From Nut Hazel Cross down the Vale to the Lonicera bush (that is the lowest point) where we meet Chartridge parish. Then up over the ridge [White Hawridge, or The Mountain] along the hedge [an ancient hedgerow, in Hawridge parish] into the next bottom [Hawridge Dean, or White Hawridge Bottom], up the bottom to Ray's Hill, and up the hill to Braziers End, where

we stopped and cut the cross. Afterwards we went along the road to the corner of the wood [Widow Croft] at Dundridge, over the open ground and down to Three Gates, and up Arrewig ['earwig'] Lane, which is The Lee boundary, to Old Brun's Farm, and Councillor Angier [first chairman of Chiltern District Council] cut the cross where we met Wendover parish. Then across to Grimsdyke on the Aston Clinton boundary, and along the dyke to the pig farm [Leylands Farm] on the Buckland boundary (that is the highest point) and still along the dyke on the Drayton boundary into Shire Lane, and back again down the lane to Cholesbury Bottom.

This definition of the boundary has a close though certainly unintended resemblance to the style of a tenth-century land charter. Indeed, it illustrates how the boundary clause of such a charter must have been compiled from descriptions by the leading inhabitants of the township concerned, during or following an actual perambulation.

As far as possible the description is in terms of linear features (roads, lanes, valley bottoms, hedges, the Dyke) together with mention of points where the boundary changes its character. This is the best way to mere a parish; it is first evidenced in our country in the Monks Risborough charter of 903<sup>17</sup>. There are sixteen distinct stretches along the 12-mile perimeter, and the description is quite adequate as an aide-memoire for those who know the area, though to a stranger it might leave some points uncertain. It has clearly been found helpful to use descriptions even where minor place-names exist for the features described.

Crosses were cut in the turf where the party halted, roughly each three miles. This is perhaps not typical; at Waddesdon, where very detailed accounts of successive septennial perambulations are available, crosses and other marks are cut much more frequently<sup>18</sup>. One feature common to Waddesdon, Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards and many land charters is the special attention paid to triple boundaries

where one neighbouring parish is succeeded by another<sup>19</sup>.

The perambulation was made clockwise, a rule which appears to be invariable in Buckinghamshire. It did not start at a cardinal point, or at the highest point, but at a point close to Cholesbury church and the village centre. The same convenient practice was followed at Monks Risborough when the custom of perambulation was revived, in spite of the contrary indication given by the charter.

The 1974 perambulation was made without reference to any map, and this accounts for one departure from the official bounds. The parish and county boundary is defined between Cholesbury Common and Heath End by the line of a hedge which has long been grubbed.

No attempt was made to follow this line on the ground; instead, the party went straight 'up and across the ploughed field'. The same robust practice has been adopted at The Lee under similar circumstances, and at Waddesdon where a brook has been straightened the writer has noted that the procession now follows the new course rather than the old one<sup>20</sup>. Except where parish boundaries have been redefined in a modern statutory instrument, they still rest on ancient custom, which has been ascertained and 'frozen' by the Ordnance Survey; but where physical changes have obliterated an ancient boundary, the parishioners naturally make their own adaptation, and over the centuries minor changes will often have occurred in this way.

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19. Cf. 'to dreo gemære, of drim gemærum . . .' in the Olney charter, S 834.
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