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York Castle Museum

Dated: 20/03/2013

The Ring is Royal?

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Press Release

Escrick ring believed to be hundreds of years older than first thought and possibly royal

A sapphire ring which was found near York is thought to be hundreds of years older than first thought - and have possible royal connections.

Experts discussing the Escrick Ring at a workshop in York thought it was probably from the 5th or 6th century – not the 10th or 11th as originally believed.

They also suggested the ring was made in Europe, possibly France, and that it would have belonged to a king, leader or consort – not a Bishop which was a previous theory.

The wear on the ring also suggests that it could have been a brooch first, which was later made into a ring.

Natalie McCaul, curator of archaeology at the Yorkshire Museum who owns the ring, said: "What this workshop has shown is that this sapphire ring is even more special than we had previously thought. Nothing like it has been found in this country from the 5th or 6th century.

"It has been fantastic to hear the thoughts of some of the world's leading experts and their suggestions will allow us to now go away and try and fit the ring into a historical timeframe.

"Hopefully this will lead us to finding out more about the ring and possibly even who might have owned it."

The workshop was attended by more than 30 experts from across the country. After a day of talks, presentations and discussions the main theories were that the ring was of a style similar to others found in Europe in the 5th or 6th centuries.

This link to Europe and the fact nothing has been found like it in Britain before, suggest that is where it was made. When checking for other examples of ring from this period, none similar were found to belong to Bishops, which suggests it would have belonged to a King, leader or consort.

The sapphire in the ring was probably cut earlier, possibly during the Roman period, but the ring itself was specially made around the sapphire. By looking at the wear on the ring it is thought that it was worn for at least 50 years before it was lost.

The gold hoop that forms the ring also looks slightly different to the main part of the ring, with suggestions being made that it was turned into a ring later, possibly from a brooch or mount.

One alternative suggestion made was that the ring was from a later period (perhaps the 8th or 9th centuries) but was inspired by earlier styles in both jewellery and perhaps surviving stonework in Yorkshire dating from the 5th or 6th centuries.

The theories suggested during the day will now be followed up, with particular attention paid to where the ring was found and any archaeology or historical information relating to it from the 5th or 6th centuries. This will be conducted initially by researchers from the University of Durham.

Technology such as X-Rays will be carried out to research further how it was made and the sapphire and glass elements will be studied more comprehensively. Samples will also be taken from the gold hoop, to see if it is a different gold from the main part of the ring.

The nationally important gold ring was found by metal detectorist Michael Greenhorn, from York and District Metal Detecting Club, in 2009. It measures around 2.5cm across and is intricately made of gold, prestige glass and a large sapphire.

The Yorkshire Museum has raised £35,000 to buy the ring, with generous grants of £10,000 from the Art Fund, £10,000 from the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, £10,000 from the Headley Trust and £1,000 from the Yorkshire Philosophical Society.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

For more information, images and interviews, contact Lee Clark, York Museums Trust, on 01904 687673 or email lee.clark@ymt.org.uk

Art Fund Notes to Editors

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity, helping UK museums and galleries to buy, show and share art. It offers many ways of enjoying art through the National Art Pass which gives free entry to over 200 museums, galleries and historic houses across the country as well as 50% off major exhibitions. Over the past 5 years, the Art Fund has given £24 million to 248 museums and galleries to buy art. It also sponsors the UK tour of the ARTIST ROOMS collection – reaching several million people each year, and fundraises: recent campaigns include bringing in £6 million to save the Staffordshire Hoard for the West Midlands and Brueghel the Younger's *The Procession to Calvary* for Nostell Priory. It is funded entirely by its 80,000 supporters who believe great art should be for everyone to enjoy. Find out more about the Art Fund and how to buy a National Art Pass at <http://www.artfund.org/>.

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