

SAINTS FROM THE PAST

Ceri Laugharne

On 24 April 2000, which was Easter Bank Holiday Monday, a member of the Pembrokeshire Prospectors Club, Brian Laugharne, was in Pembroke researching his family history as it related to Pembroke Castle. While researching the history behind his family name, which was linked to the siege at Pembroke Castle involving Oliver Cromwell, he noticed some land quite close to this site that seemed historically interesting.

After inquiries, Brian managed to find out who owned the land and approached the gentleman concerned.

such as sandwiches and flasks of tea.

As they made their way to Pembroke, they debated as to what sort of day they would have. Brian said "I think we are going to be lucky today."

Bernard was relatively new to the hobby. He had taken it up for the exercise and from an interest in local history. Despite only having been in the hobby for a short time, he had taken to it like a duck to water! Bernard had achieved some good results very early on, and since then had gone from strength to strength.

They arrived at Pembroke at about

He called out "What have you found?"

Bernard replied "I've found my first gold ring!"

"Well done!" Brian shouted back, to which Bernard answered "I'm going to carry on for a little while but will meet you back at the van in four or five minutes."

As Brian carried on he also received a signal. At the time he was unaware of what it was, but with further investigation it proved to be a pilgrim's badge made of lead with a fish on it.

On meeting Bernard at the entrance



He asked permission for his metal detecting partner, Bernard Williams, and himself to search his land. On being given full permission to do so, Brian assured the landowner that should they find anything of interest or value that they would immediately inform him. Brian informed the landowner of the relevant laws appertaining to the hobby (ie the Treasure Act 1996 etc).

Upon his return to Fishguard, Brian contacted his partner Bernard and said that he had acquired a site for searching, which might be of historical interest. Brian did not tell Bernard where the site was, because he wanted it to be a surprise. They arranged to visit the new site on the following Sunday, which was 30 April.

On the morning concerned they loaded the van with Brian's White's XLT and Bernard's Classic 3 SL detectors along with all the other essentials,

9.45am, and after getting their kit ready had a quick cup of tea before they started. The weather was intensely hot and they found it quite hard going. They had been searching for about three hours when they bumped into each other again. Brian asked Bernard what he had found, and Bernard emptied his finds pouch of quite a few items but nothing of outstanding interest. Brian had also found only a few musket balls, some bits and pieces of lead, and one or two modern halfpennies and pennies.

The weather was becoming hotter, and Bernard suggested that they return to the van for some refreshments. They searched while making their way back, Bernard taking the lower route while Brian took the higher. They had been detecting for about 10 minutes when Brian heard Bernard call out. As Brian glanced across the field he noticed that Bernard was holding his hand in the air.

of the field, Brian asked him if he could look at the ring. When he did so, he noticed that it had some old script written on it, which he could neither read nor understand.

On inspecting it further he said to Bernard "I think this is a major find".

Bernard then asked, "What do you mean?" to which Brian replied "This is not your average ring, this is very old".

This was a point that Bernard couldn't understand for the simple reason that he hadn't brought along his reading glasses. He said "I just thought it was an ordinary ring. How old do you think it is?"

Brian had been in the hobby two years, while Bernard had only logged up six months. They were both therefore relatively new to the detecting. However, the style of the ring, the inscription, its weight and colour, and the fact that there were no signs of any hallmarks made it obvious that

the ring was not a modern find.

On returning to the van they had more time to examine the ring, which was later to be dated as 15th century. The detail and craftsmanship that has gone into it really leaves you wondering how such high standards were achieved, considering that medieval goldsmiths were working with fairly primitive tools and equipment.

Bernard and Brian went to see the landowner but unfortunately he wasn't at home.

They decided to continue searching, but didn't find anything else apart from a few pieces of scrap lead. At 5.30pm they decided to call it a day and return home to Fishguard.

On the journey home they both speculated on the age of the ring, the significance of its design, and who would have worn it. They were also curious as to how the ring came to be lost.

On their return to Fishguard they spoke to other members of their club and also contacted Adrian Young, a long standing member of the Pembrokeshire Prospectors. Adrian is quite knowledgeable on finds and informed them that he had a lot of literature relating to iconographic rings.

On establishing that this artefact was likely to be classed as Treasure and would need to be reported, they notified the landowner on the following day. They explained to him that this was a very important artefact, and said that they would bring it to him to see before the coroner took custody of it.

Upon the instructions of the local coroner Bernard took the ring to the museums reporting centre at Scolton Manor, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire. On 26 May 2000 the ring was then sent to the Department of Archaeology and Numismatics, National Museum Of Wales, Cardiff for identification and dating by Dr. M. Redknapp.



Diameter approx 21mm.

On 19 July 2000, Bernard received a letter from Dr. Redknapp giving details of the ring. The description is as follows:-

"A gold iconographic ring with a weight of 6.75 grams. It has a ridged bezel with two faces engraved on it with the images of St. Barbara holding a tower in her right hand on the left hand panel and John the Baptist with a halo in Lake Galilee on the right hand panel. The hoop is shaped with a twist or wreath, and the shoulders of the ring is decorated with sprigs and pentafoils. Each bears a single word to form the legend "NUL AWI" meaning "NONE OTHER" in black letter script between the sprigs. It is dated 15th century."

Dr. Redknapp also remarked that such iconographic rings can bear one or more Christian scenes, such as an annunciation angel on one panel and Mary on the other. St. Barbara was especially venerated in the late Middle Ages for her supposed power to protect from sudden death. On many rings she is shown with her emblem the tower (in which she was imprisoned). Dr. Redknapp also stated that the ring has not been subjected to any conservation or cleaning. He estimated the metal content of the ring, judging from its colour and weight, and a visual comparison to other gold rings in the collection of the department in the

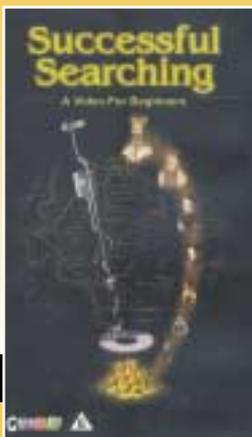
museum, to be well in excess of 10% gold.

In his summary and conclusion, he stated that in terms of size and design, the ring is a fine example of a religious ring. In comparison with other rings, he suggested that it is probably late 15th century (circa 1500).

Only two other iconographic rings have been found in Wales: one near Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, and the other in Pencaer-mawr, near Usk, South Wales. In his final conclusion he stated that an object with at least 10% of its weight being precious metal, and that is at least 300 years old, is Treasure under the Treasure Act 1996. He also stated that the National Museum Of Wales would like to acquire this item for the national collection, as the local museum had no interest in obtaining the ring.

Bernard received a letter from the coroner stating that a date had been set of 31 August 2000 at the coroner's court at Milford Haven for the inquest into the finding of the ring. Bernard was asked to attend to give evidence as to how the ring was found and the whereabouts of the find spot.

On the day of the inquest, Bernard was commended by the coroner for the way he had reported his find. The coroner also congratulated Bernard on his find, and stated that it is sad so far as he was concerned that finds made in the area do not go on local display in a county museum, but end up in national museums. He said that he would personally try and find out if it was possible to have an exhibition of Pembrokeshire finds from the National Museum Of Wales to be put on locally. This was in order that the people of Pembrokeshire could see the effort prospectors put into their hobby to save our history for future generations, and to let people see what history lay beneath their feet. TH



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