

Dress rings, lead mounts and a pewter token

John Cherry, Mark A Hall and J D Bateson

Dress rings

Dress rings of metal

John Cherry

Four rings were recovered during the excavation; two from deposits dating from the early 14th century – the floor of a house (B34) and an occupation layer of what may have been an industrial workyard (B53). The other two examples were earlier, one (Cat No 1/A9999) being found in Pit 3789, one of the earliest pits to be excavated on the site (see Fascicule 1, The excavation, 35). The remaining ring (Cat No 2/A9051) was discovered in a layer which had been laid down as early as the first half of the 12th century. Comparatively little can be said about the rings as a group, but they include one or two features which are worthy of note. It is unlikely that the earliest ring (Cat No 1/A9999) would have been dated to the 12th century without the evidence of stratigraphy. There is, however, no reason why it should not be so early and it indicates the appearance of a poor quality ring of that date. The use of animal head decoration at the junction of the hoop and bezel, as on Cat No 2/A9051, may be paralleled on grander gold rings of the 13th century, for instance that found at Cannington in Wiltshire (*BM*, British Museum exhibition catalogue no 370, 224). As the pit feature has been dated as early as the 12th century, its presence on this Perth lead ring (Cat No 2/A9051) suggests that the idea may indeed have been earlier. The simple decoration on the bezel of the Perth example recalls the silver ring found at Lark Hill, Worcester, which consisted of three square central panels with linear patterns (Thompson 1956, 148, no 381, Plate XXXIVb (1). Stirrup shaped rings, as Cat No 3/A04-0421, were one of the most common types in the medieval period, occurring both in gold and in bronze. They range in date from the 13th to 14th centuries. The drawings of this type that occur in Matthew Paris (1256) were probably in the middle of their popularity (Oman 1974, Plates 61 and 62). A comparable example is the bronze ring from the excavation at Baker Lane, King's Lynn (Clarke and Carter 1977, 287, Fig 130 no 2) which is dated to c1250-1300. The remaining ring (Cat No 4/A04-0201) is so small and thin that it is difficult to imagine that it could have been worn at all. It is possible that it was a toy ring. Small lead objects were used as toys, though the group from Amsterdam (Baart 1977, 465-471) does not contain any rings.

Glass ring

Mark A Hall

Excavated in the 1977 season, Cat No 5/A10-0016 was until recently identified as a jet ring and has been referred to as such in a previous fascicule (see Fascicule 1, The excavation, 66). Microscopic examination in late 2011 established that it is in fact a fragment of a devitrified glass finger ring. The glass report having already been published in Fascicule 4, the opportunity is taken to publish it here with the other dress rings from the excavation.

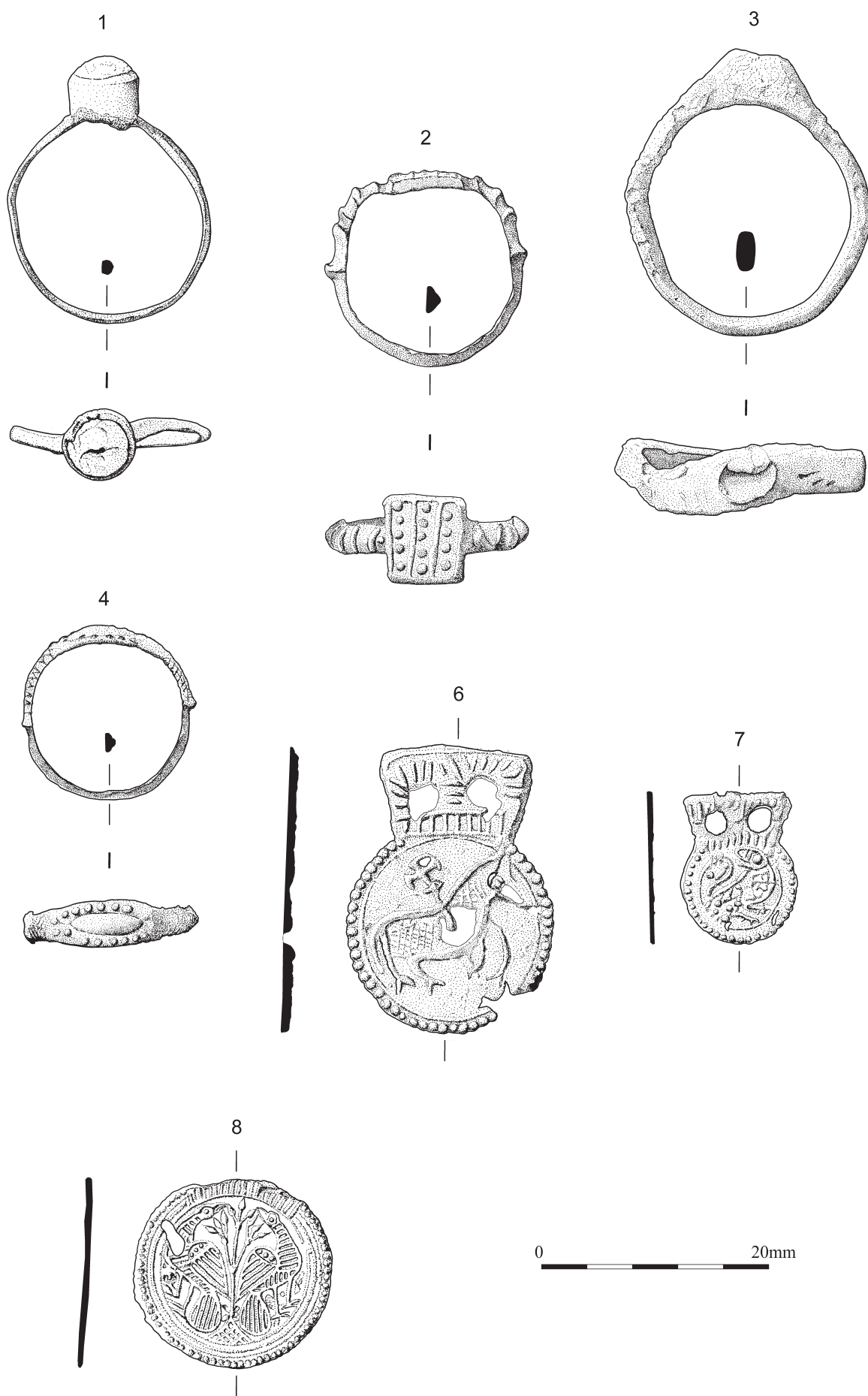
The fragment represents fractionally less than one half of a finger ring. Decay has darkened the colour but the microscope permits yellow and green to be seen. A group of five glass rings was excavated in Winchester (Charleston 1990, 652-3), two of them green and three of them yellow. Like the Perth example all were plain and D-sectioned externally. The Winchester examples range in size from 18mm to 24mm, with fragment 2097 the closest match at 15mm. The Perth metal dress rings catalogued here range from 15mm to 21mm and Cherry suggests that the lead example, measuring 15mm, is small enough to be a toy. The manufacture of glass rings is discussed by Charleston (1990, 652) drawing on the 12th-century treatise *De diversis artibus* (II, ch. 31), by the monk Theophilus, who describes the use of an iron-spiked wooden rod to pierce and differentially size molten glass globules (Hawthorne and Smith 1979).

The late 13th-century date of the context of the Perth example shows no sharp disparity with the later examples from Winchester (where the spread of dates begins in the 11th century) and the secular, domestic context is also shared. Four of the Winchester examples come from houses, whilst the fifth came from the castle courtyard. The Perth example was recovered from Building 18 (see Fascicule 1, The buildings, 176-8), a large timber hall, which in its construction, service provision (including private latrine and well) and wealth of material culture was clearly of high status.

1 Dress ring Cu alloy and glass

Ring with a very thin hoop set with a tubular bezel made from a strip of bronze and containing a piece of rounded blue glass. Diameter 17mm.

A9999; C3826-1/2; M0, Pit 3789; Phase Ia(Ib); Rig VI
Illus 155



Illus 155 Dress rings Cat Nos 1–4. Lead mounts Cat Nos 6, 7. Pewter token Cat No 8.

2 (302) Dress ring Pb

Lead ring with thin semicircular sectioned hoop. The hoop has on the shoulders two debased animal heads from whose mouths a beaded continuation of the hoop emerges to support a square bezel decorated with a raised design consisting of three vertical lines with pellets between them. Diameter 17mm. 13th-century?

A9051; C2265-4; MC116; Phase IIe–IIIc; Rig V
Illus 155

3 (1063) Dress ring Cu and Pb alloy

Ring, stirrup shaped, bent hoop of pointed oval section. Empty setting for stone at top of bezel. Diameter 21mm. cf Oman 1974, Plates 61 and 62. 13th/14th-century

A04-0421; L3235; C7187-7; B34-Floor; Phase Va; Rig VI
Illus 155

4 (1395) Dress ring Pb

Ring, long thin bezel with a horizontal pointed oval bezel with beading above and below. Diameter 15mm. So small that it may be a toy.

A04-0201; C7123-7; B53 (Phase 1), North Area-Occupation(1b); Phase Vb; Rig VII
Illus 155

5 Dress or finger ring Glass

Plain, D-sectioned yellow and green glass ring; less than half remaining. Diameter (approx.) 15.8mm; thickness 3.8mm; weight 0.25g

A10-0016; C9165-9; B18 (Phase 2a), North Room and Hall–Construction (1); Phase IVb; Rig VII
Not illustrated

Lead mounts

John Cherry

These mounts (Cat No 6/A12576 and Cat No 7/A6036) are unusual. Comparable objects were found in the river Seine in the early 19th century and were published by A Forgeais (1866, 215). He published 15 such objects; all had two holes at the top and in the circle beneath were the following designs: eagles, either single or double-headed, lions and vessels and one design that is hard to interpret but may be the *Agnus Dei*. He thought that the objects were a type of toy wallet or purse.

Although their shape does vaguely suggest a purse, this interpretation is not convincing. It seems more likely that the two holes are for stitching the objects onto cloth or other fabric. In this respect they resemble the paillettes or Italian silver ornaments often sewn onto late 13th-century dress (Newton 1980, 25; Steingraber 1957, 51), while the type of decoration within the circle resembles that on 13th-century pewter jettons (cf Cat No 8/A9279, below; Dolley and Seaby 1971, 446). The *Agnus Dei* motif also occurs on two types of these jettons (ibid nos 2 and 3) and several of the designs on them have animals with their heads turning back. No similar objects are known from sites

in Britain and it may be that the two Perth High Street mounts are imports from France. Against this, it should be remembered that the *Agnus Dei* motif (as portrayed on Cat No 6/A12576) is commonly associated with St John the Baptist. Throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period Perth was commonly referred to as St John's Town after its burgh church, the Kirk of the Holy Cross of St John the Baptist. Its St John's Day fair was for long famous.

6 (295) Lead mount Pb

Mount decorated with a beaded circle within which there is an *Agnus Dei*. The top of the mount is decorated with vertical lines with two holes. Height 25mm; width 18mm. cf Forgeais 1866, 215; Mills 1983, 6. See also this Fascicule, Hall and Spencer, Devotional Cat No 14.

13th century?

A12576; C3874-1/2; MC112b; Phase IIIb; Rig VII
Illus 155

7 (862) Lead mount Pb

Lead mount decorated with a beaded circle within which there is an animal (?debased lion) with curved tail and head turned back. The top of the mount is pierced with two holes. Height 13mm; width 10mm. cf Forgeais 1866, 215; Mills 1983, 6. See also this Fascicule, Hall and Spencer, Devotional Cat No 15.

13th century?

A6036; C2462A-3; M1.4c; Phase IIIa-IVcc; Rigs V and VI
Illus 155

Pewter token

J D Bateson

The pewter trade token from Perth High Street is an example of what is now a well known issue of medieval tokens found in the British Isles and known principally from two major hoards, the earlier of which was unearthed in 1845 on the site of the ditch outside London Wall near Aldersgate Street (Smith 1854, 156–7), and the later discovered during excavations in Winetavern Street, Dublin, in 1971 (Dolley and Seaby 1971, 446–8). A provisional listing of the 34 types found on these tokens shows a normal obverse to consist of an emblem such as an *Agnus Dei*, a bishop, bird or pilgrim amongst others, less common, while the reverse depicts a shield, cross or other simple geometric pattern (ibid, 447).

The Perth example, while it has similarities to some of these, should be recorded as a new type. The obverse design is akin to that on types 30–32 though on the latter the two birds face each other and it is a cross rather than a tree which separates them. There is also some similarity to types 20–23 where a single bird looks backwards towards a small cross. The reverse is unusual in being blank although types 33 and 34, from Dublin, possess blank obverses. The average size of the tokens found in Dublin is 16mm, but a proportion of the London Wall specimens have a diameter 'slightly in excess' of these. The weight of the Dublin pieces

averages 0.70g, not much above that of the present token which, however, suffers from being incomplete.

The birds on the Perth token are finely executed and much superior to those found on the other types where the birds are invariably cruder in appearance. In all cases the birds are rather stylised and it is difficult to be sure which species is being represented. In the present instance they are obviously large, long-legged birds with long tails. They are probably peacocks, though one might have expected the tails to be more exaggerated; they could possibly represent pheasants. The single birds found on types 20–23 have been described as pelicans (*ibid*) while the pair on types 30–32 have been designated as fighting cocks (Smith 1854, 157). There may be some argument in favour of the Perth birds being peacocks, if one takes the tree to represent the tree of life, the true vine or Christ and the peacocks the immortality to be gained by those feeding from it. It may thus be an allegory of the Eucharist, 'I am the bread of life ... he who eats this bread will live forever'. This symbolism was commonly used in the sixth and seventh centuries in Mediterranean countries, eg on a relief from a chancel slab of the sixth century from the church of Saint Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (Van der Meer and Mohrmann 1958, 133).

There was uncertainty as to the date of these tokens until the Dublin find placed them firmly in the later 13th century (Dolley and Seaby 1971, 448). They probably circulated at a time when the various monetary issues of the British Isles did not include small change in the form of half pennies and farthings. This deficiency was remedied in the reformed coinages of Edward I in 1279 and that of Alexander III shortly afterwards, and it has been suggested that the tokens were then suppressed.

There has also been some speculation as to their function. It was at first believed, and is now generally accepted, that they were used as tavern tokens. Many of the emblems have been interpreted as inn signs (Smith 1854, 157). The alternative argument is for a religious use, especially in connection with pilgrimage, in view of the religious nature of many of the designs (Caldecott and Yates 1907, 325).

In this respect the only other find of a similar nature from Scotland may be indicative. In the National Museum of Scotland there is a stone mould for making tokens of this kind; it was found at Dundrennan Abbey in Kirkcudbrightshire about 1843 (NMA 1892, 293). This mould shows admirably how the tokens were manufactured, being cast, in this case at least, six at a time. Many of the tokens found in Dublin were noted as having the traces of a tang where they had obviously been broken off from the branch running from the main casting runnel of the mould. There is no trace of such a tang on the Perth token but there is a slight portion of the edge missing at the top, about the head of the bird on the left, and it was probably here that this token was joined to the branch runnel of its own mould. The hole in the token is irregular but smooth

and is probably the result of atmospheric occlusion during casting. About 60% of the surface of the reverse is covered with the remains of air bubbles. Analyses of a group of the Dublin tokens and two specimens in the British Museum showed that they are made of pewter (Dolley and Seaby 1971, 447). The Perth token is thus an extremely interesting find of what is the earliest issue of tokens in the British Isles and is a useful addition to the corpus of the class of object.

8 (401) Token Sn/Pb alloy

Thin disc with elongated hole towards one side; diameter 17mm, weight 0.62g. Obverse: two birds (?peacocks) perched back to back, their heads turned backwards towards a central tree bearing fruit; this within three circles and an outermost border of pellets, all four broken at top by a short section of vertical bars. Reverse: ?very lightly incised cross; originally blank. cf Caldecott and Yates 1907, 317–326; Dolley and Seaby 1971, 446–48. See also this Fascicule, Hall and Spencer, *Devotional Cat No 13*.

A9279; L5441; (NMA–F0150); C2560–3; P2.2a and P2.3a; Phase IVa, IVaa; Rig V
Illus 155

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