

A Bronze Age gold penannular ring from Welton, Lincolnshire

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The Collection has recently acquired a new example of Bronze Age goldworking, found in Lincolnshire and reported as Treasure, increasing the number of these important early pieces in the museum's collections.

In September 2011 a metal detector user discovered a Bronze Age gold penannular ring at Welton, northeast of Lincoln. The ring, measuring only 15mm in diameter and weighing 10.67 grams, consists of three solid strands of gold soldered together. X-ray fluorescence analysis at the British Museum's Department of Conservation and Scientific Research revealed that the surface of the ring consisted of 83-85% gold, 14-15% silver and approximately 1% copper.

The ring is superficially similar to a growing number of Bronze Age penannular rings found in Britain, and to the only other example currently known from Lincolnshire – found at Gayton le Marsh and now also in the collections of The Collection. The rings date from the Middle to Late Bronze Age (c.1,300-1,000 BC) and are therefore indicative of the earliest uses of gold found in Britain.

The purpose of these penannular rings is still not fully understood. Solid examples (consisting only of one thicker piece of gold), are often referred to as 'ring money' and thought to be an early form of currency. Another suggestion has been that they were worn in the hair as ornaments. Of course, it is misleading to draw a firm line between 'currency' and 'jewellery', as an object of value designed to be traded or given in gift exchanges could also be worn as high status jewellery. Important finds in Cambridgeshire, Berkshire and Norfolk of penannular rings threaded onto gold wire have provided an alternative method of wearing or storing such rings. In these instances, 6 or 7 rings were found together.

The Collection would like to thank the Friends of Lincoln Museums and Art Gallery for their kind support in enabling the museum to purchase this important object.

Acknowledgements

The contents of this paper have drawn research from the Coroner's report for this treasure item, produced by the British Museum.

