

An Anglo Saxon gold and garnet insect pendant from Horncastle, Lincolnshire

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This stunning gold and cloisonné garnet pendant was discovered near Horncastle in 2003. Anglo Saxon art is resplendent with examples of subtle animal imagery and this brooch is a superb example, being in the form of an insect, with flared wings and semi-circular and triangular cells to represent the face. A perforated bi-conical bead was used to suspend the pendant from a chain.

This pendant is more complicated than it might appear, however, as it is actually the combination of craftsmanship from 2 centuries apart. The cloisonné inlay has fish-scale like cells. This form of cell is rare, being known on only two other items in Europe, both of which date to the 5th Century. The first is a saddle fitting in the form of an eagle from Romania, the second a fish-shaped brooch from Switzerland.

In contrast, the elegant bi-conical suspension bead is a 7th Century form. It appears, therefore, that this pendant represents a piece of 5th Century European cloisonné work converted into a pendant in 7th Century England. Evidence of this amalgamation can be seen at the terminals of the cloisonné wings. One is rounded, but the other had already lost its terminal cell before re-use. The 7th Century craftsman simply put his new gold surround around the remaining contour, creating a flatter terminal. No doubt such incorporation of older workmanship made the pendant an item of even greater significance to its 7th Century owner.

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