

Medieval Finds case 21, Early History gallery (Great Hall, ground floor)

Brooches, Buckles and Strap-ends

From plain bronze buckles to finely engraved silver, jewellery reflected the status of the wearer as well as fashion. However, most brooches, buckles and strap-ends were used first and foremost to fasten clothing, belts or shoes.

Annular (circular or ring-brooches) were common throughout the medieval period and were used for fastening garments at the neck. They range from plain and functional brooches in copper alloy, to elaborate and expensive ones in precious metals, set with gems. Gemstones were attributed with special powers which could protect or heal the wearer.

From top, left to right:

Acc No	Object
2009.8	Medieval silver brooch , 13 th century, from Clavering
2010.31	Silver-gilt annular brooch set with sapphire and garnet , early 14 th century, from Broxted, <i>Purchased with the support of the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Headley Trust</i>
2008.1	Silver-gilt annular brooch set with garnets , Elsenham, 14 th century
1984.236	Gilt-bronze annular brooch , half the frame with twisted cable decoration. Found near Whittlesford, south Cambridgeshire.
2007.30	Miniature silver buckle , late 13 th – early 14 th century, from Felsted
2008.2	Silver buckle-plate , 14 th century with engraved flower design, from Thaxted
ACS 86 SF 346	Copper alloy buckle with buckle-plate , for a narrow strap or belt. Late 12 th – late 14 th century, excavated from Stansted Airport, Airport Catering Site.
RWS 87 SF 119	Copper alloy D-shaped Buckle , pin missing, late 12 th – late 14 th century. Excavated at Stansted Airport, Roundwood site.
1994.16	Circular buckle of copper alloy, with central bar, pin missing. Medieval or Tudor, possibly a belt buckle. From Clavering.
RWS 87 SF 070	Double-loop buckle , of copper alloy. This type of buckle was sometimes used with sword-belts and scabbards. Excavated at Stansted Airport, Roundwood site.
1882.62	Copper alloy hinged strap-end or book-clasp with animal-head . 14 th – 15 th century, from London..
LBS 89 SF 46	Copper alloy strap-end for a thin leather strap. This type date from the late Saxon period, spanning the Norman conquest (9 th to 11 th century). Excavated at Stansted Airport, Long Border site.
10,026	Strap-end with engraved decoration and end-loop . Copper alloy. This chunky type of strap-end seems to have come into fashion in the Tudor period (16 th century).

10,163 10,021	Oval buckles with central bar. Copper alloy. Buckles of this type were mostly shoe buckles and continue from the late Middle Ages through the Tudor and Stuart periods (15 th – 17 th centuries)
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Religious Symbols

The Church and religious houses had a high profile in the community and economy, so it is not surprising that we find objects associated with churches, religious objects and cults of popular saints.

From top left:

Accession No.	Object
2005.104	St George silver badge, Takeley, 15th century. Tiny badge showing St George on horseback lancing a dragon which lies under the horse's feet. St George became a popular saint in England after his alleged miraculous intervention at the battle of Antioch in 1098 during the First Crusade. He was frequently invoked by English troops in battle and by the time of the Battle of Agincourt (1415) the feast of St George was already a national holiday. Many badges of St George survive from 15 th and early 16 th centuries, attesting to his widespread popularity. His cult was especially associated with Windsor, where the St George Chapel housed relics of St George (including heart and a leg) and became the home of the Order of the Garter.
2007.10	Silver mount engraved with winged lion, High Roding. 15 th century. The finely-engraved winged lion is the symbol of St Mark. It is possible that this mount decorated the cover of a Bible or Gospels, or a religious object such as a pax (a tablet showing the Crucifixion and other religious symbols, kissed during Mass as a sign of peace (Latin <i>pax</i>))
2354	Pilgrim's Ampulla A miniature lead-alloy flask which contained holy oil or water from a shrine. These were common pilgrim souvenirs. They are often decorated with heraldic designs, as in this case, and other symbols which sometimes relate to a specific saint or shrine.
2003.26	Papal Bull (lead seal), Felsted, 14th century. Seals (Latin <i>bullae</i>) like this were attached to important documents sent out from Rome by the Roman Catholic Church, and bore the seal of the Pope. These documents were public decrees on all manner of Church business, such as Church law and doctrine, appointment of bishops, excommunications and the canonisation of saints. The seal shows the heads of St Paul and St Peter and the letters SPASPE above, an abbreviation of their names in Latin S anctus P aulus and S anctus P etrus. The reverse bears the name of Pope Gregory XI so this bull can be dated to 1370 – 78. His title appears as GREGORIUS PP, the last two letters standing for <i>Pastor Pastorum</i> – 'shepherd of shepherds'.

A handful of Finger-rings

Personal items like finger-rings often carried inscriptions – perhaps a personal message to the wearer of love or faithfulness, or an invocation for the protection of Jesus, the Virgin Mary or one of the saints. Rings were sometimes worn on upper finger joints or even thumbs, but the small size of some rings suggests that they were worn by a child rather than an adult

From left (little finger) to thumb (right):

Accession No.	Object
2003.45	Gold ring, Saffron Walden area, 15th Century Probably worn by a child or young woman. The hoop is engraved with a band, along which knots and 'S's are alternately entwined.
2007.31	Gode be trewe ring, Clavering. Late Medieval – early Tudor period, late 15 th – early 16 th centuries The inside of the hoop is engraved 'gode be trewe' – 'good be true'
2005.89	Jesus of Nazareth fede ring, silver-gilt, Clavering, 13th century. The bezel of the ring forms two clasped hands, so it may have been given as a betrothal ring or token of love. The inscription round the hoop reads 'Jesus of Nazareth'. To its owner, it was both an expression of Christian faith and protection against disease. The name of Jesus was often invoked as a magical charm against certain ailments, such as muscular spasms. In the Middle Ages, religious or mystical inscriptions on jewellery and other personal items were thought by some to ward off evil powers and ailments. A number of similar rings are known from various sites around England. One other is recorded from Uttlesford district – a ring said to have been found at Chesterford, and now in the Braybrooke collection at the British Museum.
2010.32	Gold ring with secret inscription, Elsenham, late 14th – early 15th cent. Engraved inside the hoop, so known only to the wearer, is a secret message of love in French which appears to read 'tout...ioe' ('all...joy'). The outside is decorated with four-petalled flowers in diamond-shaped panels. <i>Purchased with the support of the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Headley Trust</i>
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2007.35	Ave Maria ring, High Easter, 13th century. The hoop is moulded in the form of two clasped hands and is engraved 'AVE MARIA' – 'Hail Mary', the beginning of a prayer to the Virgin Mary.
2010.33	Silver-gilt ring, High Easter, 16th cent. The hoop is a broad, flat band (not completely closed) with traces of gilding and a wreath pattern on a dotted background engraved on the outside.
10,107	IHS copper alloy ring, Thaxted The letters IHS (which stand for Jesus) are engraved on the bezel.

Purse Bars for Medieval Wallets

Textile or leather purses were hung by the metal loop from the belt, and the horizontal bar was attached to the top of the purse, which had a flap lid, little like a small satchel.

From top left:

1894.11/3	Purse mount , bronze, swivel loop and short bar
10,135	Purse mount , bronze, swivel loop and short bar
1900.10	Purse bar , bronze, inscribed AVE MARIA... A number of purse bars bearing the inscription 'Hail Mary full of grace...' have been found across England; an example with purse frame attached is displayed in the Museum of London. The owner may have hoped that the Virgin Mary would protect the purse and wearer from thieves and dishonest traders.

Armed Men and Decorated Horses

Weapons and accessories in common use, and objects associated with horses.

From top left:

CXVI	Iron dagger with bone and gilt-bronze handle, for military use. From Castle Camps, south Cambridgeshire.
Lab. 653	Iron dagger , with handle missing, late 14 th century. This sort of dagger would have been carried for general use, as a tool and a defensive weapon.
1894.110	Iron arrowhead probably for military use, 11 th – 13 th century.
2011.24	Iron arrowhead , barbed and socketed, long-lived medieval type used for hunting, Wendens Ambo.
(unnumbered)	Iron prick-spur , late 13 th century. Found near the Battle Ditches, the early medieval town boundary ditch of Saffron Walden.
RWS 89 SF 120	Copper alloy link from horse-harness , excavated at Stansted Airport, Roundwood site. The two rings have animal heads facing each other across the central bar, and the rings have worn thin with use. Copper alloy harness fittings with animal ornament were also popular in the Late Iron Age, over 2,000 years ago, but the style of this piece is thought to be medieval rather than Iron Age.
1984.234	Part of a decorated copper alloy spur , from Linton, south Cambridgeshire. This is a higher-class spur than the plain iron prick-spur.
RWS 87 SF 113	Whetstone made of a type of rock called schist, for sharpening knife-blades. It shows little sign of wear but is cracked, so may have been thrown away. Excavated at Stansted Airport, Roundwood site.
C1	Copper alloy guard from a dagger handle , from Bartlow, south Cambridgeshire.
2010.56	Gilt-bronze and enamel harness pendant , from Berden.

2005.17

Copper alloy and enamel heraldic pendant from harness, on a piece of copper alloy binding for a leather harness-strap. The shield is red with a lion rampant. Such badges would be worn by the servants and followers of a knight or lord.