

Post medieval gold mourning ring found in Middlewich.

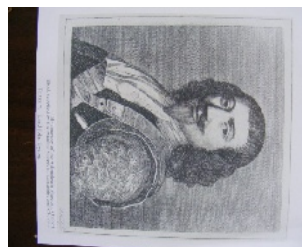


Yet another fantastic piece of history comes to light! A 17th Century ring has been found; decorated with the most fabulous floral scroll work with black enamelling. On the interior is inscribed with 'Death is the way to life'.

This beautiful ring may have been made between 1658 – 1669 and

would have been worked on by a very fine craftsman. It's not your average gold ring!

In Middlewich Roman finds are plenty, we rarely see any objects of the 17th Century, although documents held at the Chester Record Office prove that Middlewich was trading and that the landowners of the day were making a sizeable income from salt-making.



So when the ring was made what was going on in Middlewich?

The English Civil War had taken place and in 1643 Middlewich had to endure a huge battle which heavily damaged the Church and surrounding houses and shops. Through the research of local author Allan Earl, we know that the population of Middlewich, Newton and Kinderton totalled 450 people. At the end of the Civil War it had taken the lives of 213 people, almost half of the population. With houses and agricultural land damaged it was a slow recovery for the Town, with food shortages hard to replace. The plague hit only three years later and with the people's desperate state of health they soon succumbed and the population dived once more.

The plague abated around 1649, although London were still infected, Middlewich at least could begin to rebuild. Under the new English Protectorate the country was once again at War with Spain but on the horizon was the restoration, the return of a monarch, Charles II. Such changes made their impact on communities through the country in different ways and Middlewich certainly has a story to tell.

The gold ring found in Middlewich was commissioned probably during the Restoration, interesting that a family in Middlewich had the kind of money and status for such a ring when many occupants in the town were in such

desperate need. So who does it belong to? This is a difficult question to answer as it could have been dropped at any time, however due to the condition of the ring, it doesn't seem to have a lot of wear and tear.



The ring was found on land belonging to the Venables-Vernon family, the Barons of Kinderton. One of the most famous family members is the early historian William Vernon of Middlewich and Shakerley who died in 1664; did the ring belong to a member of his family or perhaps the high ranking Steward who ran the Middlewich Estate?

So why is it important that we raise funds to buy this ring for our community?

- ◆ The ring itself is very beautiful and interesting to look at
- ◆ Rare find in Middlewich, especially of the Restoration – King Charles II era
- ◆ The ring has a story to tell about the status of Landowners and influential families in the area.
- ◆ The ring maybe a catalyst for further collection items or loans from the period
- ◆ Helps us understand more about the history of the town
- ◆ Can be used as part of school or community project work
- ◆ Protection of Middlewich Heritage, keeping items like this in a town museum

What makes the difference between seeing an item close up as opposed to looking at photographs?

- ◆ Being able to see all of the detail in the ring and able to study it more closely
- ◆ Better connection to something in front of you then flat in a picture
- ◆ Able to place the ring with other objects from the era to better understand the history of our town.

We will of course be doing further research to try and find out as much as we can about the ring and circumstances surrounding it. In the meantime, the ring has been classed as Treasure and therefore comes under the Treasure Act 1996. **It has been valued at £1,900** and is currently in the care of the British Museum. Middlewich Town Council has been given a chance to secure the ring for display in our community if we can raise the money by the **end of April 2013**.

The Heritage Development Officer is urgently looking to raise funds but seeks the public's help in raising donation money. It's a fantastic opportunity to have this item to show to the community, it represents a difficult period in the lives of Middlewich people but also the status of the landowners.

Conleton Museum have very kindly loaned their support by helping us to store the item until we can get it on display. Their help has been fantastic and shows what we can do when we work together, lets cross fingers we reach our target of £1,900, otherwise the ring will go on general sale and we will lose it. www.middlewich-heritage.org.uk or www.middlewich.org.uk