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# THE COAT OF ARMS

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# THE COAT OF ARMS

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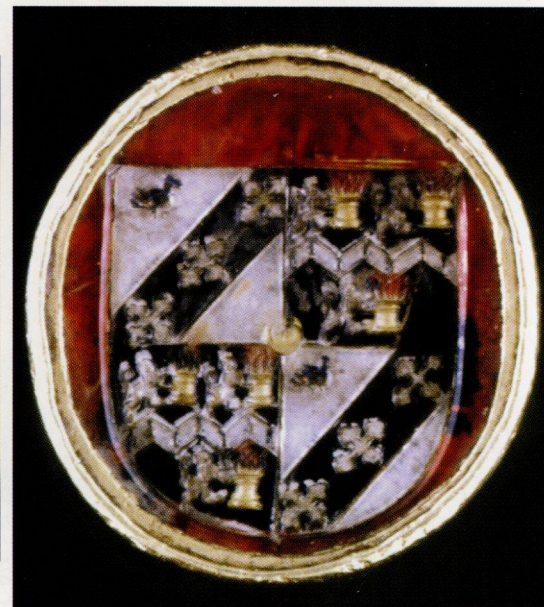
**2012**

Part 1

*Number 223 in the original series started in 1952*



## PLATE 7



The seal-set of Sir Thomas Smith. The first silver and ivory desk seal (left) bears his full achievement, the second silver and ivory desk seal (centre) is engraved with Smith's salamander in flames crest and motto QVA POTE LUCET, and a gold and foiled rock crystal signet ring (right) shows his shield only. England; c.1572-3. BM P&E 1982,7-1.1-3.

*See Page 35.*



## PLATE 8

The signet ring of Edmund Tremayne. A gold signet ring with an oval bezel set with crystal and engraved with the arms of Tremayne also bearing the initials 'ET' in reverse for Edmund Tremayne. The reverse is engraved with a grasshopper atop a mound with strong traces of green enamel. England; c. 1570s.

Barclays Group Archive  
(BGA) ref. 9/4.

*See Page 37.*



Images © Natasha Awais-Dean



## RESEARCH PROJECT

**Jewellery and men in Tudor and Jacobean England:** Queen Mary, University of London, and the British Museum.

The period beginning with the accession of Henry VIII in 1509 and ending with the death of James I of England in 1625 provides the backdrop for a doctoral project supervised jointly by Queen Mary, University of London and the British Museum.<sup>1</sup> Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, research for this project began in January 2009 and is almost at its completion. At its culmination will be a thesis entitled *Bejewelled: the male body and adornment in early modern England*.

The project investigates jewellery, including heraldic and non-heraldic signet rings, that was worn, owned, and circulated by men within the period under consideration to provide historical and social context for objects often perceived as nothing more than trifles of adornment. Jewellery meant far more to men than just its basic monetary worth. It had the ability to reflect magnificence and lineage, and sustain social bonds and networks of exchange. These values were important for supporting masculine ideals and alternative manifestations of masculinity.

Object-based analysis lies at the heart of this project but it is interdisciplinary in nature, incorporating evidence from documentary, archival, literary, and visual sources. Traditionally, studies on jewellery have focused on a chronological or stylistic approach.<sup>2</sup> These works are undeniably invaluable for the connoisseurship they provide on this subject, but in recent years there has been a shift towards providing more social and historical context for jewellery. The noted historian Diana Scarisbrick is the first to have really addressed these issues, and more recently Marcia Pointon, Charlotte Gere, and Judy Rudoe have followed suit.<sup>3</sup> This thesis aligns itself with this type of scholarship and aims to provide a social context for jewellery, by examining the men who were consumers of and agents in this form of material culture within the early modern period.

One further aspect of this project that differs substantially from established literature on jewellery is the integration of archaeological material. The majority of

<sup>1</sup> The doctoral candidate, Natasha Awais-Dean, is based in the Department of English at Queen Mary, University of London and the Department of Prehistory and Europe (P&E) at the British Museum. She is co-supervised by Professor Evelyn Welch and Dr Dora Thornton, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> See Joan Evans, *A History of Jewellery 1100-1870* (2nd edn., London 1970), Hugh Tait (ed.), *7000 Years of Jewellery* (3rd edn. repr., London 2008), Harold Clifford Smith, *Jewellery* (London 1908).

<sup>3</sup> Diana Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain 1066-1837. A documentary, social, literary and artistic survey* (Norwich 1994), Marcia R. Pointon, *Brilliant Effects. A cultural history of gem stones and jewellery* (New Haven & London 2009), Charlotte Gere and Judy Rudoe, *Jewellery in the Age of Queen Victoria. A mirror to the world* (London 2010).

studies on jewellery focus mostly on high status jewels but this is limiting, for it excludes the potential narratives of items made of base metal and those of precious materials but of simpler form. What has become clear through research for this project is that what jewellery meant to men could not be reduced to simple economics. A wedding ring, whilst not a necessary component of the marriage ceremony, was nevertheless an important signifier of a contracted union, when given by a man to his wife. It signalled to a community that he had established his own household and had reached sexual maturity, thus enabling him to start a family. This was one mode of asserting one's masculinity. It mattered not whether the ring he had given to his wife was made of precious or base metal, or even fabricated from some other material; what mattered was the context of giving. In Robert Greene's *Menaphon*, first published in 1589, following an exchange between the pair of poor country lovers Doron and Carmela, the author interrupts the narrative to address the gentlemen of the dedication.<sup>4</sup>

Well, 'twas a good world when such simplicity was used, says the old women of our time, when a ring of rush would tie as much love together as a gimmon of gold.

So, while the jewellery of the royal figures Henry VIII and James I and of prominent statesmen Sir Thomas Sackville (c. 1536-1608), Sir Thomas Smith (1513-1577), and William Herbert, first earl of Pembroke (1506/7-1570) is considered within this thesis, the jewelled possessions of ordinary men are also examined. Wills and inventories have proved useful in the assessment of ownership of men of lower means, but an invaluable repository of information has been finds reported under the terms of the Treasure Act 1996. The Act requires the reporting of metal-detector finds more than three hundred years old and with a precious metal content of at least ten percent. Since its implementation there has been a stark increase in the number of reported small finds from the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, such as dress accessories and rings: both categories are included in this thesis. These reported finds provide evidence for the wearing of less costly examples of jewellery in silver and silver-gilt. These and similar finds of base-metal jewellery unearthed through archaeological excavations and in unstratified contexts on the Thames foreshore demonstrate that the importance of jewels permeated all strata of society.

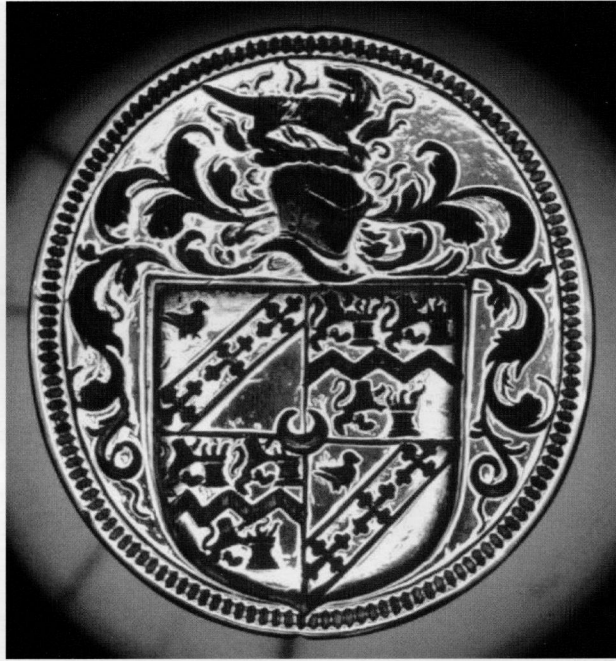
Of particular relevance to the readership of this journal is a section in this thesis devoted to signet rings. The signet ring was an item of jewellery that upheld an individual's social identity, through the roles and responsibilities it could represent in the heraldic devices adopted, and ultimately was a symbol of masculine identity. Even in its absence, represented only by the wax impression it left on a document, the signet ring was perhaps one object type that had the closest personal links to the man who owned it.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Greene, *Menaphon. Camilla's Alarm to Slumbering Euphues in his melancholy cell at Silvedra* (ed. Brenda Carter, Ottawa 1996), p.170. A 'gimmon of gold' refers to a gimmel ring, which was a popular choice for a wedding ring as it takes its name from the Latin 'gemellus' meaning 'twin'. It was usually made of two conjoined hoops that when made as one completed the form of the ring and when separate often revealed otherwise hidden messages. Each of the betrothed would take one hoop until the time of marriage at which point the ring would be made as one, if both parties still agreed to the union.



Figure 1. The first silver and ivory desk seal from the seal-set of Sir Thomas Smith, bearing his full achievement. See Plate 7 for the full set of his seals. England; c.1572-3.

BM P&E 1982.7-1.1. Image by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.



Such was the potency of a signet ring that in Thomas Heywood's early-seventeenth-century play *If You Know Me Not, You Know Nobody* Timothy willingly hands over the sum of one hundred pounds to John despite having never met him before, to pay off a debt to the London merchant and founder of the Royal Exchange Sir Thomas Gresham (c. 1518-1579). What prompts him to do so is the production by John of Gresham's signet ring. The sight of the ring provides suitable guarantee for the legitimacy of John and the transaction. As Timothy explains 'I would not have trusted you, John, without so sufficient a discharge'.<sup>5</sup>

A case-study of the seal-matrix set belonging to Sir Thomas Smith highlights the importance and appropriateness of such objects to one's station.<sup>6</sup> Smith held many offices, one of which was the position of Principal Secretary under Edward VI and Elizabeth I. Amongst these three objects is a gold signet ring with an engraved rock crystal bezel underneath which the tinctures of Smith's arms have been applied with coloured foil. The choice of a signet ring of this design (popular in the second half of the sixteenth century), over the plain gold examples, may have been to represent the dignity of Smith's office and his status at court (see **Figure 1** and **Plate 7**).

<sup>5</sup> John Payne Collier, *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood, with the Life of the Poet and remarks on his Writings* (2 vols., Shakespeare Society, London 1851), vol. 2, pp. 87, 89.

<sup>6</sup> BM P&E 1982.7-1.1-3. The set constitutes two hand-held silver and ivory desk seals and a gold and rock crystal signet ring. All three objects bear Smith's personal arms and are dated to about 1570.



Figure 2. The signet ring of Edmund Tremayne: detail of the reverse, engraved with a grasshopper atop a mound with strong traces of green enamel. England; c. 1570s. See Plate 8 for other views of the ring.

Barclays Group Archive (BGA) ref. 9/4. Image © Natasha Awais-Dean.

A second case-study is of the Gresham grasshopper rings. These rings did not belong to Thomas Gresham; rather they were gifted by him to certain individuals possibly at some point between the 1550s and 1570s. Five of these have been published and they are to be found in various public and private collections.<sup>7</sup> One that displays the arms of the London recorder Sir William Fleetwood (c.1525-1594) is in the British Museum.<sup>8</sup> These gold signet rings with foiled crystal intaglios bearing the arms of their individual owners are engraved to the reverse of their bezels with a grasshopper – the Gresham crest.<sup>9</sup> The grasshopper on the Lee, the Goodman, and the Taylor rings is enamelled, suggesting that each of the rings was made in a similar fashion, though the Fleetwood ring is now lacking its enamelling. These rings are

<sup>7</sup> The Fleetwood ring, BM P&E AF.636; the Lee Ring, V&A M.249-1928; the Goodman ring, NMW 30.236.2; the Wingfield ring, sold at Christie's London 19 Dec. 1977 and now privately owned; the Taylor ring, sold at Christie's London 9 May 1978. These rings have been published in Diana Scarisbrick, *Rings. Symbols of wealth, power and affection* (London 1993), p. 48.

<sup>8</sup> BM P&E AF.636.

<sup>9</sup> Each of the rings has a bezel of crystal but the one belonging to Sir Richard Lee of Sopwell, in the V&A, has a bezel that is set with chalcedony.



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representative of networks of male sociability within the early modern period and serve as tangible evidence of these bonds of homosociability.

A recent rediscovery by the author of a sixth grasshopper ring, which was last mentioned in a 1977 auction catalogue, widens Gresham's network. Purchased by Martin's Bank in 1947 from the collector and benefactor to the Victoria and Albert Museum Walter Hildburgh (1876-1955), this ring bears the arms of Edmund Tremayne (*d.* 1582), Clerk of the Privy Council under Elizabeth I (see **Plate 8** and **Figure 2**). The site of the principal London office of Martin's Bank, the first national bank to be based outside London, was 68 Lombard Street. This address was once occupied by Gresham and so it is the grasshopper connection that prompted the bank to purchase the ring. Following an amalgamation of Martin's Bank with Barclays Bank plc in 1969 Tremayne's signet, with its once enamelled grasshopper engraved to the reverse of its bezel, has remained within the bank's archives. It can now be viewed by appointment at the Barclays Group Archives in Manchester.<sup>10</sup>

In time more of these rings may come to light. There are certainly at least another two in existence, whose current whereabouts are unknown. A ring with the arms of Woodhouse was last presented at a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries in London on 23 September 1742.<sup>11</sup>

Mr West shewed a seal gold ring weighing better than half an ounce found in the Gresham estate in Budsdale in Suffolk the Arms were cut in Christall over the arms above the shield is 1557. The ground is foyl underneath bearing the Colours of the sheild quarterly Ermine or a Lyons Face, a Crescent in the centre? a Grasshopper is Engraved on the inside of it.

Hand-written annotations to the British Museum's copy of an article suggest that in 1982 a woman from Australia contacted the Museum to inform them that she possessed a grasshopper ring with the arms of Charles Herbert, father of Sir Edward Herbert the Attorney General to Charles I. In the past, it has been speculated that these rings were given by Gresham to mark the opening of the Royal Exchange in 1571 but at least one of the known extant rings is dated 1575,<sup>12</sup> while the missing Woodhouse ring is dated 1557. Perhaps of greater interest than identifying an occasion for these gifts is that in the giving of these rings Gresham marked out with physical objects his social connections.

The research project, *Bejewelled: the male body and adornment in early modern England*, provides a new social and historical context for the jewellery that was worn,

<sup>10</sup> I am very grateful to Jonathan Snowden, who maintains the Martin's Bank online archive for putting me in contact with the Barclays Group Archive and to Maria Sienkiewicz, Group Archivist of the Barclays Group Archives, for allowing me to handle and photograph the ring, and for providing me with information from the archives relating to its purchase.

<sup>11</sup> BL Ms Egerton 1041 (Minutes of the Society of Antiquaries 1717-1751), fo 274r (p. 503).

<sup>12</sup> George Chandler, *Four Centuries of Banking as Illustrated by the Bankers, Customers and Staff Associated with the Constituent Banks of Martins Bank Limited* (2 vols., London 1964-8), vol. 1 p. 40; W. J. Hemp, 'The Goodman and other grasshopper rings', *AntJ* 5 (1925), pp. 403-8 at 407. The ring with the arms of Sir Robert Taylor is engraved with the date on its bezel. The date also appears in gold tinctures behind the crystal face, so this cannot have been a later addition.

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owned, and circulated by men in the early modern period. Whilst it is acknowledged that there were some contexts in which jewellery was valued only in economic terms, such as when payment on board ships was made in the form of gold chains whose links corresponded exactly to contemporary coinage, most of the time it had a worth far greater than its monetary one. This thesis explores the true significance of jewels to men in Renaissance England, to show how such small items of material culture had far greater resonance than mere ornamentation and fiscal benefits.

*Natasha Awais-Dean*