

AESTEL

Unique ID: SWYOR-C75C64

Object type certainty: Certain

Workflow status: Published

The find is a gold hollow-cast zoomorphic finial, most probably to be fixed as a terminal to a æstel, or pointer. The head tapers to become a neck, which would have acted as a rimmed socket for a slender rod, secured to the terminal with a rivet through the two holes provided on the neck. The base of the object is flat. The dimensions are: length: 31mm; width: 13mm; thickness: 7mm; weight: 4.12g. The object has been squashed, and there is some damage visible below the left nostril and on the neck.

The terminal is in the shape of the head of an animal, with applied comma-shaped ears made of continuous bands of gold ribbon soldered on. The same technique is used for the eyes, which are round annulets, originally set with blue cabochon stones, of which only one now remains. Two twisted wires curl round the eyes and are extended to the base of the muzzle, giving the characteristic elongated eye-shape typical of the period. A further decorative element is the twisted wire which appears to be curling round the neck (it is actually interrupted below the piece), and probably would have represented a snake (the damage at one of the ends of the wire suggests that it may have been modified to represent the head of a snake). The snout of the animal is rather worn, but it maintains the traditional profile of the ubiquitous animal heads.

The object can be placed alongside a small group of artefacts, understood to be æstel, or perhaps the terminals of staffs of office, of which the best-known is the Alfred Jewel. This and the other of the group, the Minster Lowell Jewel, the Bowleaze Jewel, and the 'Wessex Jewel', all found at places in King Alfred's Wessex, have been recently discussed by L Webster in 'Ædificia nova: treasures of Alfred's reign', in Alfred the Great, T Reuter (Ed.), Ashgate 2003, pp. 79-103. As L Webster notes (ibid., p.85) there is a hierarchy of material value within the group. The terminal from Aughton, also geographically rather removed, is at the lower end of the scale, as it does not deploy any of the exotic materials, such as rock crystal, enamel, large cabochons, etc. seen on the others; however it is certainly an important piece.

The age of the find (the late 9th century), its precious metal content (which is greater than ten per cent) and the fact that there is no traceable owner are the three criteria by which the piece constitutes treasure under the provisions of the Treasure Act of 1996. It is therefore recommended that the Piece should be declared treasure."

Dr Anna Gannon Department of Prehistory and Europe The British Museum London 22 April 2005

Notes:

The age and precious metal content of this item meet the criteria for Treasure under the Treasure Act 1996.

Rotherham Museum and the British Museum had hoped to acquire but withdrew interest. The item was returned to the finder and sold in Bonham's auction of 15 October 2008, Lot 312.

Find of note status

This is a find of note and has been designated: National importance

Subsequent actions

Subsequent action after recording: Declared Treasure but returned to Finder as Museum unable to acquire

Treasure details

Treasure case tracking number: 2005T82

Chronology

Broad period: EARLY MEDIEVAL

Subperiod from: Late

Period from: EARLY MEDIEVAL

Subperiod to: Late

Period to: EARLY MEDIEVAL

Date from: Circa AD 850

Date to: Circa AD 900

Dimensions and weight

Quantity: 1

Length: 31 mm

Width: 13 mm

Thickness: 7 mm

Weight: 4.12 g

Discovery dates

Date(s) of discovery: Tuesday 4th January 2005 - Tuesday 4th January 2005

Personal details

Found by: This information is restricted for your login.

Recorded by: Ms Amy Downes

Identified by: Anna Gannon

Other reference numbers

Other reference: 2005T82

Treasure case number: 2005T82

Materials and construction

Primary material: Gold

Completeness: Incomplete

Spatial metadata

Region: [Yorkshire and the Humber](#) (European Region)

County or Unitary authority: [Rotherham](#) (Metropolitan District)

District: [Rotherham](#) (Metropolitan District)

To be known as: Aughton

Spatial coordinates

Grid reference source: From a paper map

Unmasked grid reference accurate to a 100 metre square.

finds.org.uk