

ART. XXVI.—A “*Tau Ring*” found at *Keswick*. By the President.

*Read at Sedbergh, August 4th, 1892.*

THE ring, exhibited this evening by the Rev. H. D. Rawnsley, was found recently in a garden near the



river Greta, at Keswick, and is one of the small class known as “tau rings.” Its date is put by Mr. Franks at about 1420; the material of which it is made is bronze, once probably gilt, and its weight is just half-an-ounce. On the table of the bezel there is engraved a rude, possibly a nude, figure carrying two heavy javelins, and flanked by palm branches, the emblems of martyrdom. A high authority has suggested that the figure is a naked S. Sebastian. S. Sebastian is represented in sacred art as pierced by arrows, or holding arrows in his hands, or having them at his feet. He appears in every variety of costume, from pure nakedness to full armour. But the peculiarity which brings this ring within the class of tau rings

rings is this: the letter tau is engraved on either shoulder of the bezel, and is, or was once, filled up with red enamel.



Rings, thus marked with taus on either shoulder of the bezel, or tau rings, are far from common. In 1873 the late Mr. Octavius Morgan, F.S.A., exhibited three of English make to the Society of Antiquaries of London, viz., (1) one of gold (now in the collection of Mr. Franks, C.B.) of the first half of the fifteenth century, with the letter R on the table of the bezel; (2) another of bronze of the fifteenth century, with a chalice and book on the table of the bezel; (3) a third of silver, with the Percy badge on the table of the bezel. He also mentioned, when exhibiting these rings, that he had seen a tau ring of gold, having a figure of S. Anthony engraved on the bezel; and he further drew attention to the tau ring of Richard Mayo, Bishop of Hereford 1504 to 1516, set with a large ruby, and having engraved a tau on each shoulder, from which hangs a little bell.\* Mr. Morgan also exhibited a pectoral tau cross of silver, which he described as both curious and interesting. On it was a crucifix; it was edged with a raised cable border, and to the arms was appended by small rings the letter A of Lombardic form, cut out of thin silver plate.

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\* Found in his tomb and engraved in *Archæologia*, vol. xxxi., p. 251.

Now

Now the tau cross, the *Crux Ansata*, or Cross of S. Anthony, is a symbol over which much learning has been expended, and to which much mystery has been attached.\* It is said that it was the mark set upon the foreheads of the faithful by the man in the linen garment with the ink horn.† The Elect, who are redeemed from the earth, bear the name of God the Father written on their foreheads, a tau mark, the tau being the first letter of *Theos*, and S. Anthony and his monks are represented as bearing the tau ‡ The tau, or crutched staff, the bell and the pig are all attributes of S. Anthony, and it is clear that these tau rings and the pectoral tau cross exhibited by Mr. Morgan have some relation to that saint. The conjecture is that they were worn by the members of some guild or confraternity of S. Anthony. There was a military order of the Knights of S. Anthony, instituted by Albert II., Duke of Bavaria and Emperor, when in 1382 he designed to make war against the Turks. The knights wore a collar of gold in the form of a hermit's girdle, from which hung a stick cut like a crutch, with a little bell attached. Such an order probably had English members, among whom was probably Bishop Mayo, but I incline to think that there was an English guild or confraternity of S. Anthony, with a branch or habitation at Crosthwaite, Keswick.

In one of the windows of Crosthwaite Church is a half-length figure, in painted glass, of S. Anthony. The saint is represented with long flowing beard and moustache, and wearing a cap or hood, and cope with an under vestment and scapular, on whose breast is a large tau, while his right hand grasps a crutch or tau staff, with

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\* See Mr. Octavius Morgan's remarks in *Proc. S. A.*, 2nd series, vol. vi. pp. 52, 53. *The Reliquary*, 1st series, vol. xv., pp. 65, 71.

† Ezekiel, chap. ix., v. 2—4.

‡ Revelations, chap. xiv., v. 1. *Jameson's Sacred and Legendary Art.*, p. 379.

bell

bell hanging therefrom, and his left hand holds a book.\* In the church there are also two brasses to Sir John Ratclyffe and Alice, his wife: he died 1527. Each of these figures carries on its breast, suspended by a chain



round the neck, a pectoral tau cross. Putting these together, Mr. Franks has suggested † that the figure of S. Anthony may have originally been in the window of a chantry in which the Radcliffes were buried. Taking the

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\* Owing to the beard and the peculiar cap, or hood, a suggestion has been made that the figure represents the post-Reformation preacher at Crosthwaite. But the undoubted figure of S. Anthony as Cartmel Fell Chapel is full bearded and moustached, and the lower part of the Crosthwaite figure is of glass of a date long prior to the Reformation. The head may possibly have belonged to another figure, but I think not, and I think that the cap is a doctor's hood.

† *Proc. S. A.*, 2nd series, vol. ii., p. 192

ring

ring into consideration, is it not possible that a small guild or confraternity of S. Anthony had a chantry in Crosthwaite Church? S. Anthony was the patron of hermits, and it is possible this guild undertook to guide people across the pathless fells around Keswick.

Cartmel Fell Chapel is dedicated to S. Anthony, and he is represented in glass in the window there, with moustache and long flowing beard, and with crutch staff, bell, pig, and tau on his robes.\* On Cartmel Fell, and also near Carlisle, the saint is commemorated in the place-name of Stony Holm, *i.e.*, S. Anthony's Holm, and the legend of his life is represented in a series of eighteen pictures painted on the backs of the stalls in Carlisle Cathedral.

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#### APPENDIX.

*To the President of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archæological Society :—*

CAMP, SOUTH SHORE,  
BLACKPOOL.

AUGUST 1ST, 1892.

DEAR SIR,—The bronze or brass finger ring which is exhibited at your meeting was discovered in a market-garden called Mill Field Garden, on the 12th of last month, by a market-gardener who was weeding. It must have been thrown up to the surface when the garden was deep-trenched, about three years ago, for the ground had not been touched, as I understand, since that time. The garden in question adjoins the Penrith Road, which at this point runs parallel with the river Greta. The spot is not far from what originally was a wath, or ford, across the Greta. And my suggestion is that the ring was either lost by a wayfarer to the ford, or else by some bather in the olden time. Possibly a man on his way to Monks Hall for the night, or else by one of the monks of Fountain's Abbey, who had crossed the river at the wath, and determined on a bathe.

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\* "S. Anthony's Chapel, Cartmel Fell," *Transactions of this Society*, vol. ii., pp. 389, 381.

The

The ring in question is a "tau" ring, the Taus. having been incised on either side the bezel, and filled in with red enamelling.

These tau rings are not uncommon, and are by some said to have been rings worn by members of the Order of St. Anthony. It would be interesting to connect the wearer of the ring with the portrait in glass of the Reformation preacher in the northern aisle of St. Kentigern's Church at Crosthwaite, or with Sir John Radlyffe and Dame Alice his wife, whose names are seen upon the altar tomb in the same church; all three wear the 'Tau' cross upon their breasts, but this must be conjecture. All that we can say is that the bronze or brass ring belonged to a biggish man; it was a bit of rough work, and not of intrinsic value, probably of the fifteenth century, and that it bears, rudely engraved on the bezil, a figure of a man with a javelin in act to be thrown in the one hand, and a spear, or javelin, at rest in the other. This may be a figure of St. Sebastian, or St. Edward, or it may be a rough copy of some Roman gem, with the figure of a warrior upon it.

The ring has been reported upon by Chancellor Ferguson and Mr. Franks, of the British Museum, and any further light that your Society can throw upon it will be most welcome.—Yours truly, H. D. RAWNSLEY.