

XI.—A MEDIAEVAL ARMORIAL SIGNET RING.

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[Read on 27th March, 1935.]

A mediaeval signet ring¹ of finely chased gold was recently found by chance in a market garden at Clayport, Alnwick. (Plate xxv, fig. 1.) The finder, Mr. Hunter, took it to archdeacon Mangin, vicar of Alnwick, who, at Mr. R. C. Bosanquet's suggestion, sent it to the writer to describe and exhibit to the society.

It is of approximately 18 carat gold, the alloy used, judging from the light colour of the gold, being probably silver; it weighs .68 oz. The bezel, which is 14 mm. in diameter, has engraved upon it, within a cable border, a ladder supported at each side by a rampant monster. Both these supporters have two horns slightly curved inwards, and both have four spikes or horns growing out of their backs, and bushy tails curved upwards above them. (Plate xxv, fig. 2.)

Beneath the device is the legend in black letter **e Paine en dure** (plate xxv, fig. 3); inside the bezel, between two engraving lines, is the "word" **de bon cor** in a rather larger type of the same script. The hoop, whose diameter is 22 mm., has a plain band around the middle, whilst the edges are bevelled concave and engraved with ermine spots, sprigs of foliage, shells, or possibly cloaks and toothed objects like combs or rakes; these are placed alternately

¹ See Introduction to *British Museum Catalogue of Finger Rings—Franks Bequest*, by O. M. Dalton, pp. xxix ff.; *Arch. Ael.*³ XVII, pp. 283 ff.

around it on both sides, and each side ends in a cinquefoil, opposite to the bezel.

On one shoulder are two of the shells or cloaks with an ermine spot beneath them and the comb-like object beneath it; on the other shoulder a sprig of foliage takes the place of the ermine spot. These engraved devices have all been filled originally with enamel, traces of white, green and black yet remaining. The date of the ring is probably about the middle of the fifteenth century and it is apparently of English workmanship.

Its owner can be identified with a reasonable degree of probability. The ladder was the canting badge (O.F. *gré*, a step or ladder) first used by sir Ralph Grey of Heton and Chillingham, who died in France in 1443;² it is carved repeatedly, together with a short cloak or cape (not unlike the "shells" upon the ring), around the upper edge of his high tomb in Chillingham church. (Plate xxv, fig. 5.) The beasts supporting the ladder are, allowing for difference in size, the same as the supporters of the shield of sir Ralph Grey on his armorial seal³ attached to a document dated 30th September, 1441, wherein he is styled "knight, captain of Mantes." (Plate xxv, fig. 4.)

The probable date, the use of the ladder and cloak badges, together with the similarity of the supporters on seal and signet, all point to its original owner having been the sir Ralph Grey mentioned above, whose alabaster effigy in plate armour lies beside that of his wife Elizabeth FitzHugh upon the high tomb in the south chapel of the parish church of St. Peter at Chillingham.⁴

NOTE.

An expert to whom the ring was sent thought that the date *circa* 1440 above suggested by the writer was rather

² *Surtees Society Publ.* 144, p. 54.

³ *Arch. Ael.*³ XXI, p. 90, no. 360, also *History of Northumberland* XIV, plate II of seals.

⁴ *Newcastle Records Series* IV, plates VII and VIII, pp. 116-18.



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Figs. 1. SIGNET RING (1). 2. BEZEL. 3. IMPRESSION (BOTH SLIGHTLY ENLARGED)

4. SEAL OF SIR RALPH GREY. 5. TOMB OF SIR RALPH GREY.

too early. If he is right then it may have belonged to the second sir Ralph Grey of Chillingham, of whose armorials no example remains.

He was constable of Alnwick castle when it was captured by queen Margaret in October, 1462. It was retaken by Edward IV in May, 1463, who gave its custody to sir John Astley. Sir Ralph was much offended at being so passed over, he retook the castle, expelled sir John Astley, and declared for Henry VI. Before the battle of Hexham (15th May, 1464) he fled to Bamburgh castle, where he was besieged by the earl of Warwick, who captured it after a heavy bombardment.⁵ Sir Ralph Grey, who was badly wounded, was taken to Edward VI at Doncaster and beheaded there on 10th July, 1464.⁶ The place where the ring was found overlooks Alnwick castle at a short remove, and if the ring was that of the second sir Ralph it might well have been lost there during the years 1462-1464.

⁵ *History of Northumberland*, by J. Hodgson-Hinde, pp. 325-8.

⁶ Pedigree of Grey of Chillingham, *History of Northumberland* XIV.