

## A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY MOURNING RING FOUND IN POSTWICK

by Steven Ashley and Andrew Rogerson

A gold finger-ring, found by Mr Kevin Canham in Postwick during the autumn of 1994 within a field containing a general scatter of medieval and post-medieval metal finds (SMR 30475), has a flattened D-sectioned hoop with an internal diameter of 17-18mm (Fig. 1). A skull is

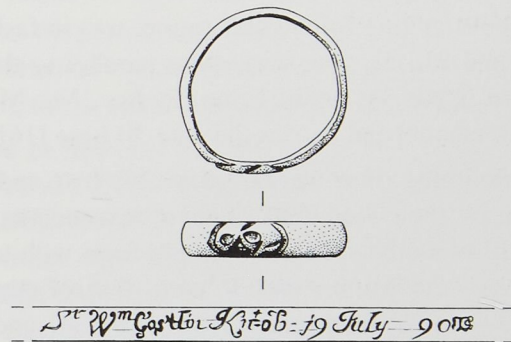


Fig. 1

Gold Mourning Ring from Postwick, Scale 1:1

engraved in a rather stylised manner on the otherwise plain exterior, and within the hoop an engraved inscription reads: *Sr Wm Gostlin Knt ob 19 July 90*. The legend is followed by a small stamped mark reading *IC*, possibly for John Clifton, a London goldsmith active in the 1680s (Pickford 1989, 142).

A William son of William and Anne Gosling, who was baptised at Morningthorpe on March 16 1640/1 (NRO Parish Register: MF/RO 257), is almost certainly one and the same as Sir William Gostlyn, a laceman by trade and member of the Mercers' Company, who was knighted in 1684 (Shaw 1971, 260; Beaven 1908, 258). The main biographical source (Woodhead 1965) gives the date of his birth as 1638 and that of his death as 28 July 1690. According to another authority (Beaven 1913, 110), he was *buried* on that day. However, the Morningthorpe parish register states that "the Right Honourable and worshippefull Sr William Gostling Knt" was buried on the 30 July 1690, on the north side of the chancel, towards the east window. Eleven days, then, elapsed between his death, presumably in London, on 19 July as the ring makes clear, and his burial in Norfolk.

There had been Gostlyns in Morningthorpe since the early 15th century, if not before. William Goslyn was granted land there in 1413 (NRO MS 14289 36B5). Interestingly, an alias of Gislingham, in variant spellings, was used by parties to several later deeds, including John, Nicholas, Mary and William Gosselyn in 1440, 1482 and 1511 (NRO MS 14293, 14301 & 14307 36B5).

By 1653 William Gostlin had left the county for a successful career in the capital: he was chosen Sheriff of London in 1684-5 and alderman for the wards of Faringdon Without (1684-6), Candlewick (1686-8) and Castle Banyard (1688-90). His third wife was Margaret daughter of John Garneys or Garnish of Boyland Hall, a major manor in Morningthorpe. The Garney family 'is and hath been many ages, esteemed one of the principal families of the county'



(Blomefield 1806, 288-94). She was to die in 1723/4 aged 69, her husband being commemorated at the base of her wall monument in the chancel.

Artefacts as reminders of mortality were common in post-medieval mortuary contexts (Llewellyn 1991). The *memento mori* tradition included mourning rings, often of gold with black-enamel inlay, as gifts for distribution amongst funeral guests, 'Mourning rings, with their personalised inscriptions, are further evidence of the growing desire for worldly remembrance to be found in early modern England' (Gittings, 1984, 160). The present example is certainly amongst the most plain and simple of such rings for many achieved considerable elaboration (Bury 1982 and Llewellyn 1991, fig. 64). This broad class of rings, with simple hoop, enamelled skull and with or without flanking foliate decoration, was in fashion between c. 1660 and c. 1740 (Dalton 1912, 207 and 213-5). One very close parallel to the Postwick ring is in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Case 34, board F, no. 5; Acc. No. M. 88-1960). It is adorned with a skull reserved in black enamel and carries the date 30 June [16]86 (Bury 1982, 218).

It is likely that few gold mourning rings were irretrievably lost, and quite possible that many were sold for melting down by their recipients or their descendants. Nevertheless it remains surprising that details of only two others, each of simple form with an enamelled skull, are to be found in the Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record, that of Anne Calthorpe (ob. 1695) which was found during 1994 in Warham parish (SMR 29433) and one inscribed *memento mori* recovered from Beeston Regis parish during 1996. It is to be hoped that further examples will be reported in the coming years.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Patrick Dickenson, Richmond Herald, for assisting us onto the right track in our pursuit of Sir William Gostlyn, and Dr Sue Margeson for her initial help and subsequent guidance.

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