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## **What is the Fishergate Ring?**

- ***When was it made?***
- ***Who was it made for?***
- ***Where was it found?***
- ***What happened to it?***

# ***What is the Fishergate Ring?***



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***“A large finger ring, made of solid gold.***

***The style is unique and it has no close parallels.***

***Its exceptional status and the mysteries surrounding its discovery make it one of most exciting early medieval objects ever found in York”.***

*Quotes from YMT*



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***At the centre is a human face, with a long nose, strange hair and possibly a beard.***



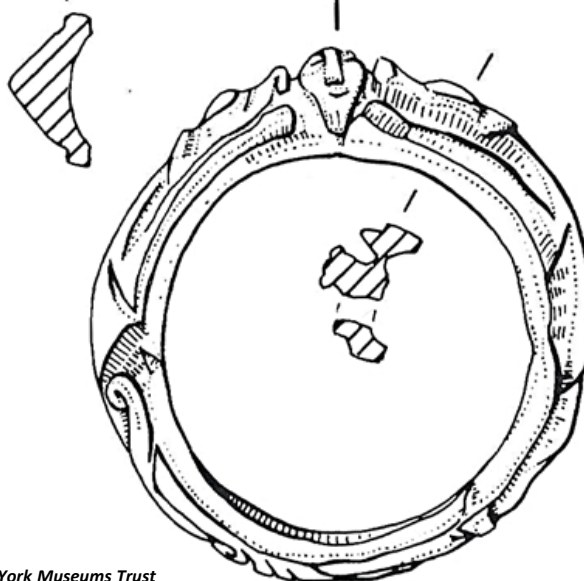
***Either side of the face are two beasts with long eyes, square snouts and long thin legs stretching forward.***

***The animals merge into a twisted plant design which joins together at the base of the ring.***

***The combination of plants and animals is common in the early medieval period but the inclusion of a human face is very unusual.***



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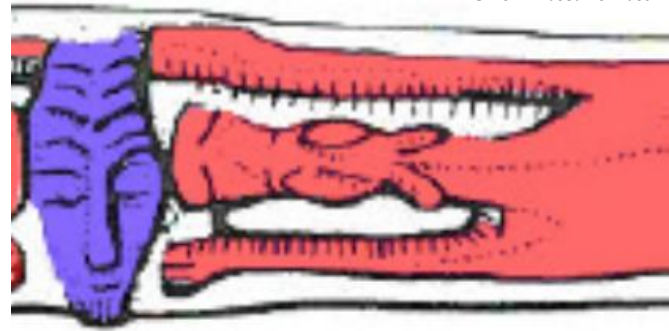


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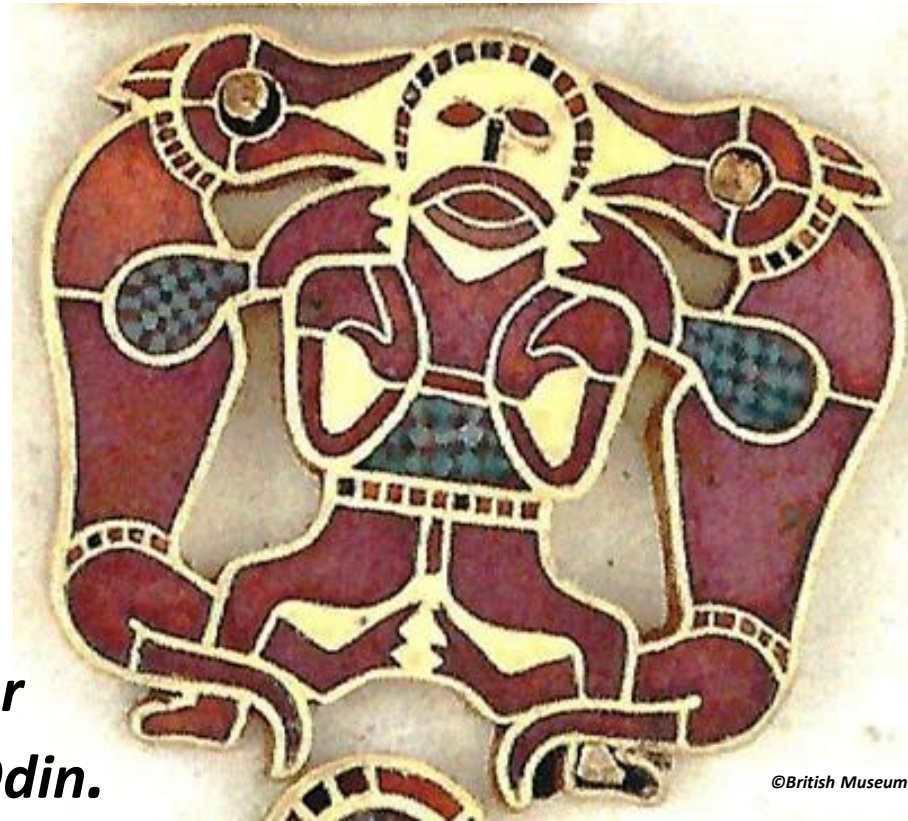
*Animals biting  
the head on the  
Fishergate Ring*



*Decoration on the Purse Lid -  
Sutton Hoo ship burial.  
Anglo-Saxon, early 7th century.*

***Odin Pendant from Winterton,  
Lincs. With ravens Huginn &  
Munnin. 10th century, Viking.***

***In Norse mythology:  
Huginn -"thought" & Muninn –  
"memory" are Ravens that fly all over  
the world and bring information to Odin.***



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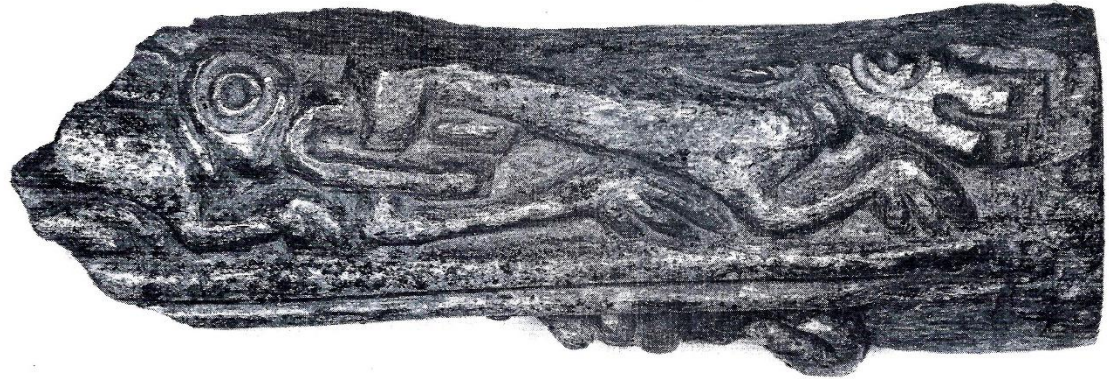
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***Animals were commonly used to form the ends of metal items, such as these 9<sup>th</sup> Century strap-ends found at Poppleton.***



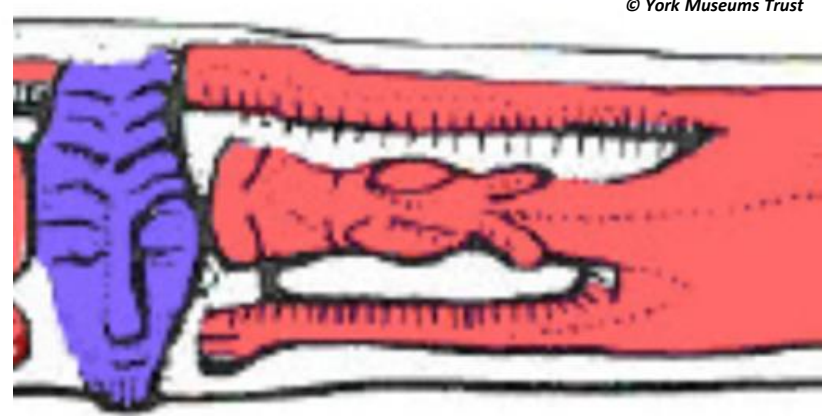
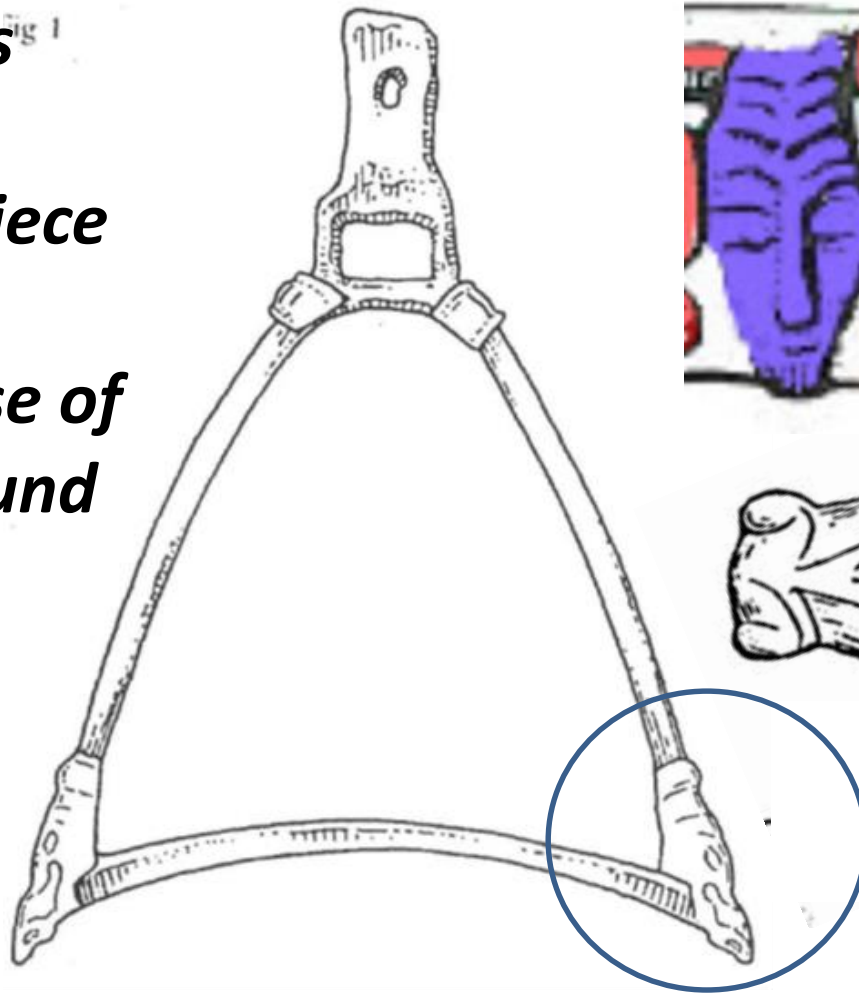
**Similar animal decoration found in York.**



© York Archaeology Trust

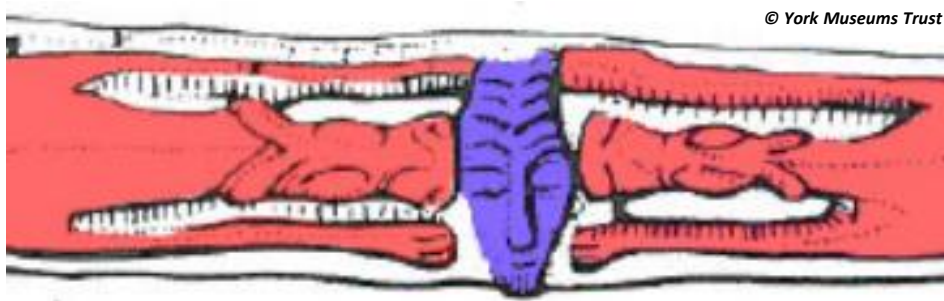
***Part of an early 7<sup>th</sup> century bone handle, found near the Novotel in Fishergate.***

***Animal heads forming the connecting piece between the sides and base of a stirrup. Found in Chalgrove, Oxfordshire.***



© David Williams – Finds Research Group

***The animals are similar to those on the Fishergate Ring - snub-nosed with bulging eyes, ears and eyebrows. Second half of the 11th century, of Scandinavian inspiration reflecting the late Viking 'Ringerike and Urnes styles.***



The 8<sup>th</sup> century  
Coppergate  
Helmet has an  
internal  
inscription -  
*“in the name of  
our Lord Jesus  
Christ, the Holy  
Spirit and God;  
and to all we  
say Amen.  
Oshere”*



## *When was it made?*

**The Fishergate ring has long been thought to date from before the Viking conquest of York in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.**

**But last year, former British Museum expert, Dr. Leslie Webster, examined the ring and proposed that it is more likely to be 11<sup>th</sup> century, possibly from the time of Cnut (King of England and Denmark, 1016-1035), or slightly later.**

***This challenges previous thinking and has sparked a new interest in the ring and a reassessment of the evidence.***

# *When was it made?*

**Why does she date it to this time?**

- The heads of the animals with bulging 'lentoid' eyes and whisker 'lappets' around the mouth are Anglo-Scandinavian style.*
- The legs stretching forward are also seen on Carolingian designs.*
- On the back of the ring, the merging of the animal bodies into a possible acanthus leaf design is indicative of Christian imagery.*
- There is little sign of wear, so it has probably not been worn much, suggesting it was not passed between owners or handed down over generations, so its manufacture and burial dates are probably fairly close.*



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## *When was it made?*

**Rosemary Cramp; Anglian and Viking York:  
Borthwick Paper 33. p18. 1967**

***“Some evidence for the taste of the wealthy Anglo-Viking society in York is shown in the gold finger ring discovered in the construction of the glass-works in Fishergate.***

***- The animals are similar to a late 9th century cross at Collingham.***

***- The plant ornament on the loop of the ring is reminiscent of late Anglian plant scrolls on crosses.***

***- The motif of a human between two animals is an ancient one in Germanic art, but perhaps we have a reference to St Edmund, whose cult was so enthusiastically fostered by the Viking invaders.”***

***- “The date could be late 9th or early 10th century.”***

## *When was it made?*

**Dominic Tweddle; Anglian York: A Survey of the Evidence.  
AY 7/2, No. 170. p.284. 1999**

***“Reported to have been found on the finger of a skeleton on the Redfearn Glassworks site in about 1930, the exact location of the discovery is not recorded.***

***The nature of the decoration, with animals developing into plant ornament, indicates a date in the early part of the 9<sup>th</sup> century”***

## *When was it made?*

**Nicola Rogers; Anglian and other Finds from 46 – 54  
Fishergate. The Archaeology of York – The Small Finds. 17/9.  
p1373. 1993.**

***“...dates from the 9<sup>th</sup> century and probably to the period  
before the Viking conquest of York.***

***Comparisons can be drawn between the ornament on the  
ring and the decoration of the manuscripts BL Royal 1.E.VI***

***“suggest a date after c.820-840AD.***

## *When was it made?*

**Dr. Jane Kershaw, University College London.**

**(Correspondence with YMT, 2014).**

***“I've looked at the decoration of the ring in a bit more detail and I would go with a later dating.***

***- The animal heads seem to me to have Ringerike-style features, especially in the slight upturn of the snout and in the almond shape of the eye.***

***- The triangular face-mask is also something that occurs quite frequently in Scandinavian contexts.***

***- I think the composition of two confronted Ringerike-style animal heads also points to a later date - there's a silver arm-ring from Vall, Gotland, with facing Ringerike-style animal heads in a similar fashion.***

***- I think the ring is probably late 10th to early 11th century.”***

# *When was it made?*

|                         |                           |                                    |         |  |           |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|--|-----------|
| D. Tweddle              | ●                         |                                    |         |  |           |
| V. Rogers               | ●                         |                                    |         |  |           |
| R. Cramp                |                           | ●                                  | ●       |  |           |
| M. Wood                 |                           | ●                                  |         |  |           |
| J. Kershaw              |                           |                                    |         | ●  | ●         |
| L .Webster              |                           |                                    |         |  | ●         |
| J. Campbell             |                           |                                    |         |  | ●         |
| Power & Culture in York | 800-860                   | 860-900                            | 900-950 | 950-1000                                 | 1000-1068 |
|                         | Anglian<br>(Mostly Pagan) | Viking<br>(Increasingly Christian) |         | Anglo-Scandinavian<br>(Mostly Christian) |           |

*It may be significant that the recent scholarship places the ring in the Anglo-Scandinavian period.*

# *Who was it made for? No One Knows!*



***Dr. Michael Wood;***

***'In Search of the Dark Ages', p.177. 2005.***

***"But if one artefact could be chosen to represent their taste it would be the beautiful gold finger ring which someone lost in Fishergate in the early 10th century."***

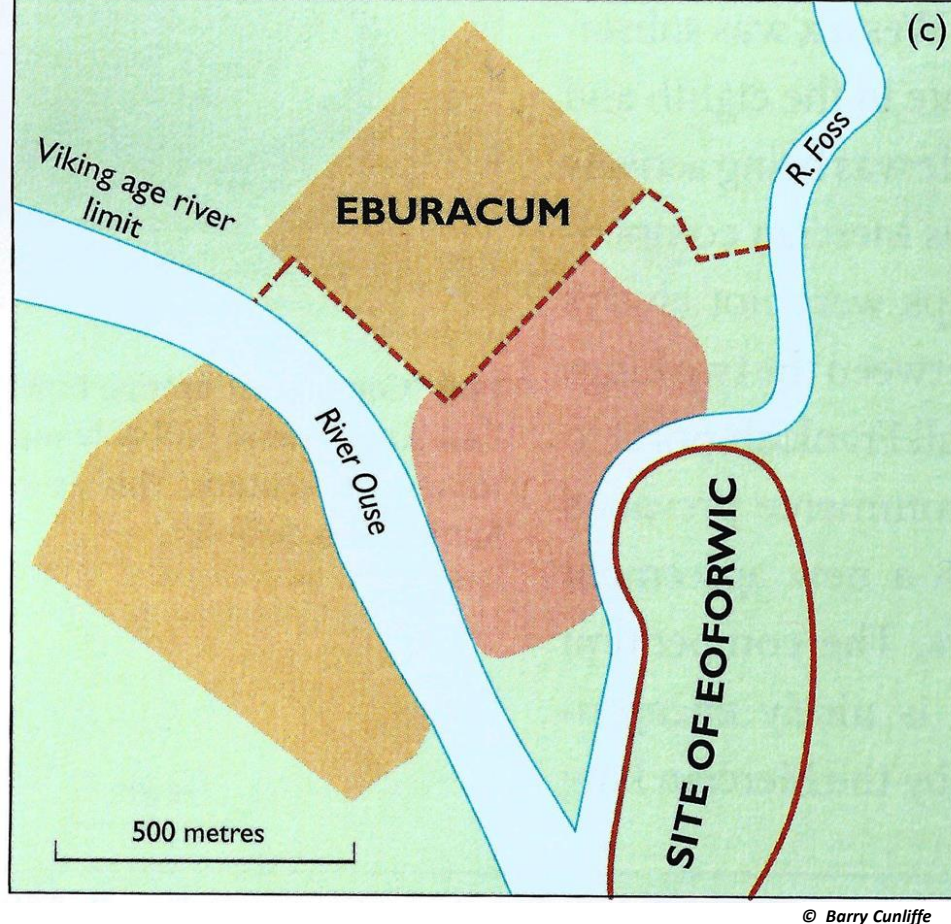
***"Any of the wealthy citizens of Viking York might have worn this: Earl Orm, Aethelferth the monyer, Grim, Archbishop Wulfstan, even Eric Blood Axe..."***

# *Who was it made for?*

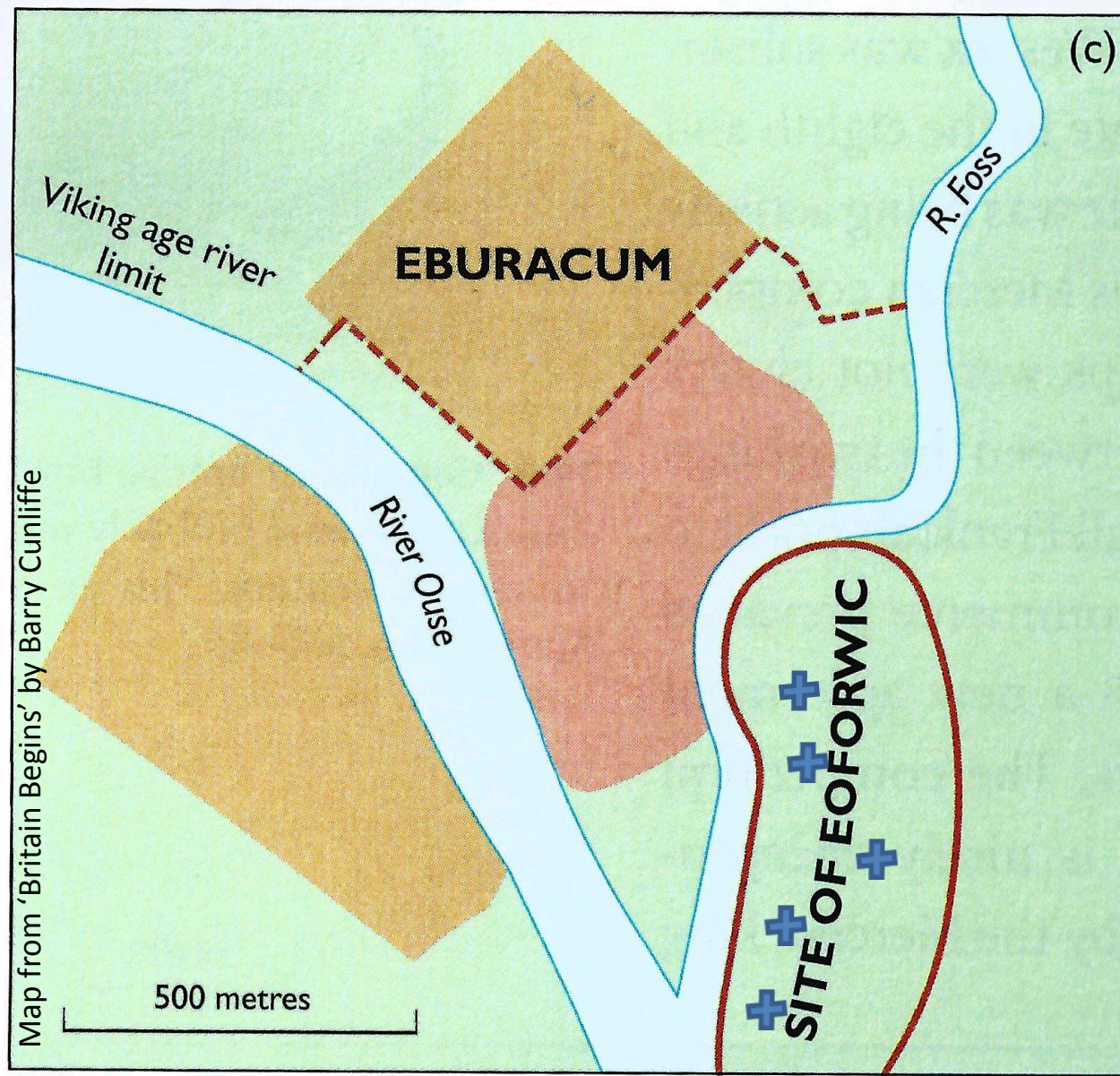
**Fishergate was a flourishing manufacturing and trading centre in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> C. Anglian period.**

***It diminished in importance during the Viking period, but its recovery is demonstrated by the foundation of churches before the Norman conquest.***

***St Helen's Church was built near Fishergate House and St Andrew's was in Fewster Way, in front of the Novotel.***  
***It is possible that the powerful people running the site would have been buried there too, perhaps at St Andrew's churchyard, near where the ring was found.***



*Who  
was it  
made  
for?*



St Stephen  
St George  
All Saints  
St Andrew  
St Helen

## Fishergate's Pre-Norman Churches

# Who was it made for?

Anglian Fishergate was a very creative place!

*This Roman intaglio was found there which was probably intended to be re-worked into a new piece of jewellery.*



© Archaeology Planning  
Consultancy



Anglian  
Fishergate was  
not as densely  
inhabited as  
this YAT view  
of Viking  
Coppergate



© York Museums Trust

## *Who was it made for?*

**YAT Report A/Y 11/2; describes St Andrew's cemetery as:**

***"....well organised, with graves largely in rows surrounding what may be a small timber church."***

***"Amongst the burials were a large number [19 out of 47] of adult males with unhealed blade injuries, many of whom appear to have been buried at the same time."***

***"....their average stature was 1.74m, compared with the mean stature of 1.71m for the remainder of the males from that period." (ie. they were 5'-8 1/2" tall, 1.5" taller than normal)***

***"....They were also younger than average, with 12 of the 19 being between 20 and 30 years old."***

## *Who was it made for?*

**YAT Report A/Y 11/2; describes some burials in St Andrew's cemetery as:**

***“This difference in height and age, and the probability that many of these individuals were buried at the same time.....suggests that these men may have been directly involved in battles nearby.”***

***“The battles of Fulford and Stamford Bridge, fought in 1066, would provide a convenient historical context for these events, and fit quite well with the suggested date....of the second half of the 11th century, as would the battles for York castle in 1067-9.”***

**This time fits with the date suggested by Leslie Webster of early/mid-11th century.**

# *Who was it made for? Let's speculate!*

**Professor Kelly DeVries 1999 book;  
'The Norwegian Invasion of England in 1066',  
p.296, says that....**

***“after the battle of Stamford Bridge....Harold then returned  
to the battlefield, identified Tostig's body by the wart  
between his shoulders and commanded that it be taken back  
to York and buried in an un-named church there.”***

**- Could that church be St Andrew's Fishergate?**

# *Where was it found?*

*It was found at the Glassworks in Fishergate around 1930.*

*The first glassworks was opened 1794*

*by Hampston & Prince, originally making flint glass and medicinal phials.*

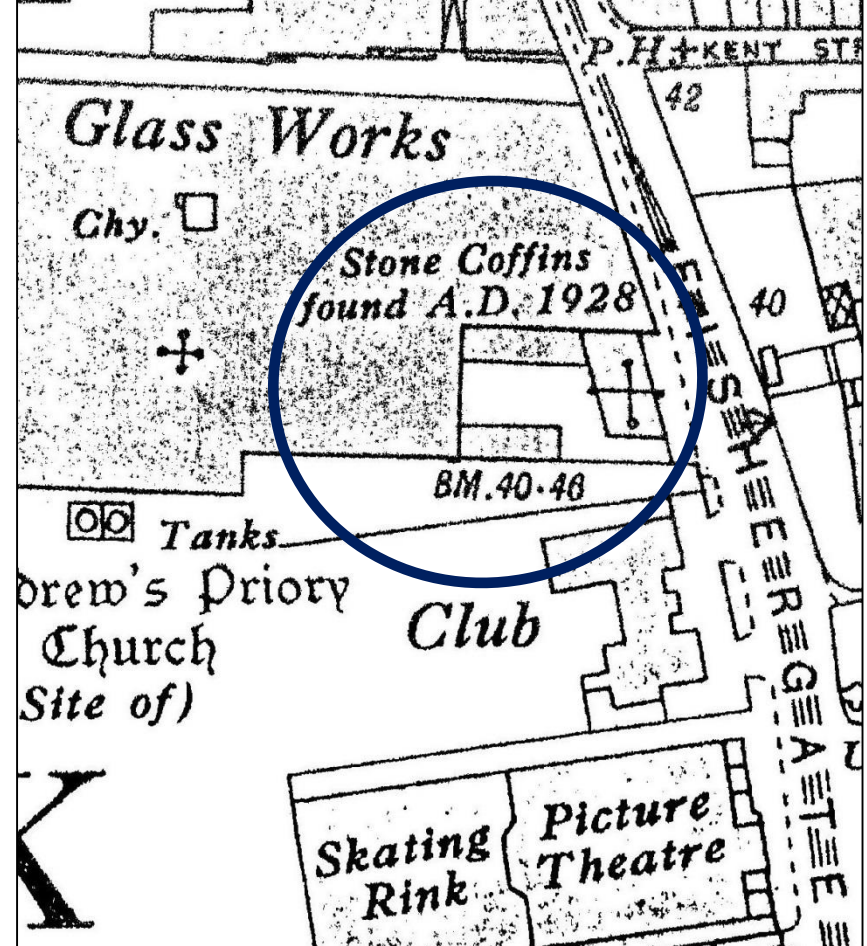
*The York Flint Glass company was set up in 1835 and by 1851 was a larger employer than Terrys.*

*In 1930 it was incorporated as National Glass works (York) Ltd. which became the Redfearn National Glass Company in 1967. It was demolished in 1984.*



© Imagine York

# Where was it found?



1931 OS maps of Fishergate  
and the glassworks  
*Was the ring found by  
builders extending the  
works?*

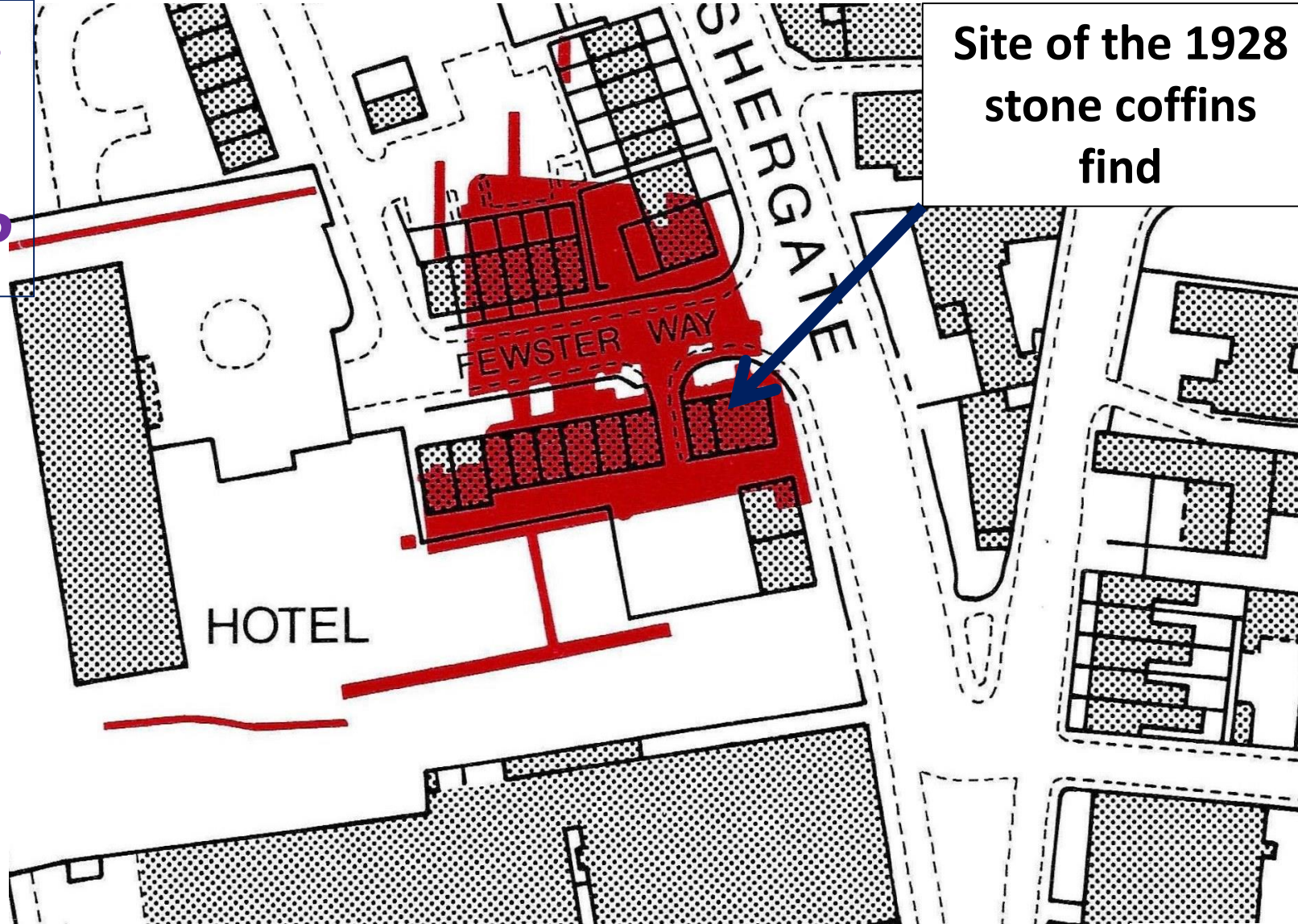
# *Where was it found?*

*After the glassworks was demolished, York Archaeological Trust undertook a major investigation of the area and found the Anglian 'Wic', Eoforwic's 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century craft manufacturing, and trading centre. They also found the pre-Norman church of St Andrew and the 13<sup>th</sup> C. Gilbertine Priory.*



*Where  
was it  
found?*

**Site of the 1928  
stone coffins  
find**



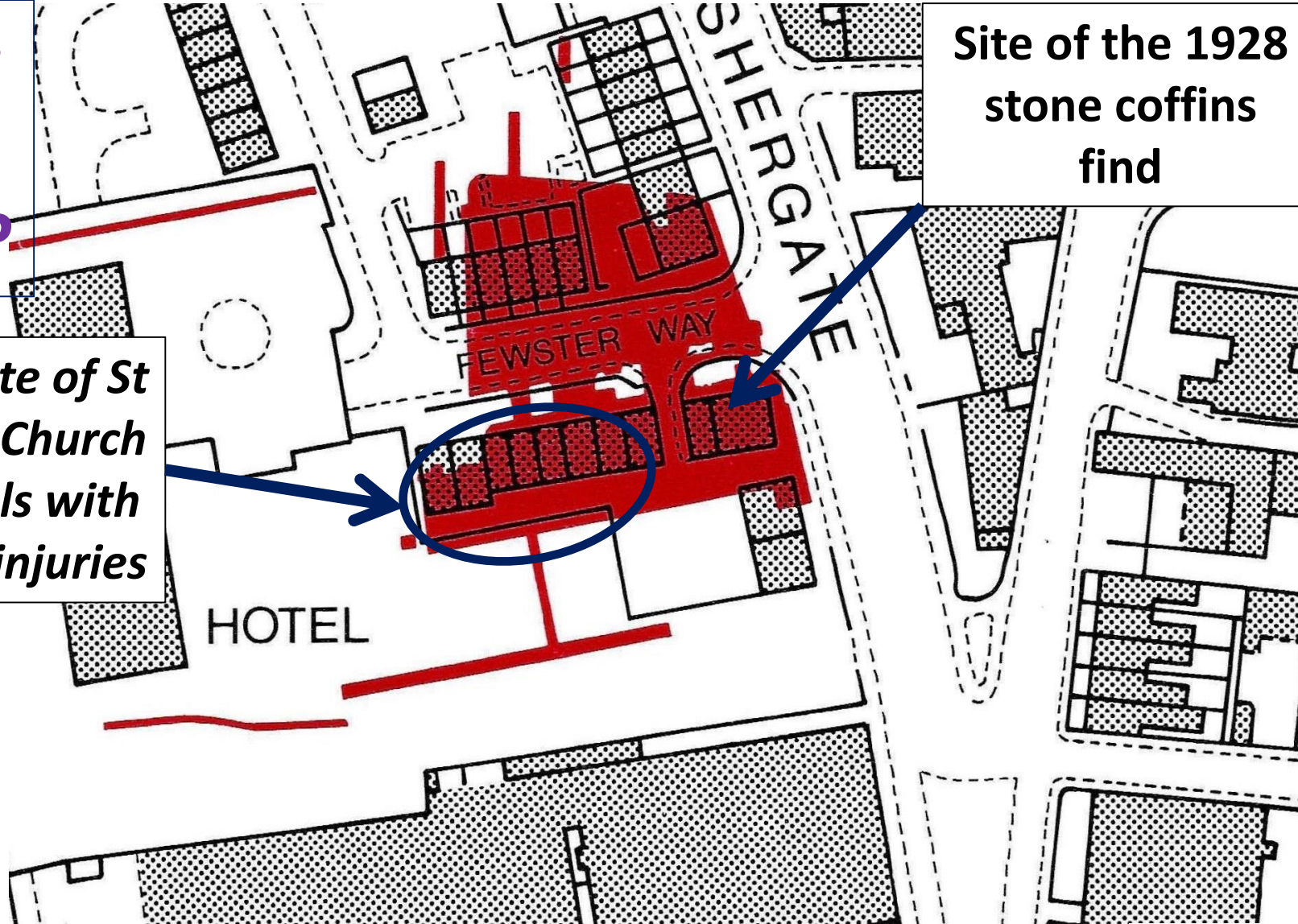
© York Archaeology Trust

**The red area is the extent of  
archaeological investigations in 1985/6**

***Where  
was it  
found?***

***Approx. site of St  
Andrew's Church  
and burials with  
weapons injuries***

**Site of the 1928  
stone coffins  
find**



© York Archaeology Trust

***St Andrew's Church was built in timber  
late 10<sup>th</sup> C to early 11<sup>th</sup> C. - rebuilt in stone late 11<sup>th</sup> Century***

## *Where was it found?*

**Glassworks archives have a record saying workmen are reported to have found a....**

***'small cubicle about eighteen inches square, formed of flags loosely put together, in which imbedded in the soil, which had penetrated through the crevices of the flags was a human skull and a gold finger ring or ear-ring.***

***The skull was perfect with the exception of a deep hole in one side of the head.***

***Near to this was also found a curious leaden medallion, about two inches across, stamped with an ecclesiastical device, and some fragments of the priory buildings'***

*Where was it found & who was it made for ?*

**Was the skeleton and ring found in a stone coffin?**

*Stone coffins were found during the YAT excavations, but these seem to have been 13<sup>th</sup> century.*

The use of a stone coffin suggests high status and was probably a patron of the Priory.



© York Archaeology Trust

*A 13<sup>th</sup> century stone coffin with skeleton found in the cloister alley of St Andrews Priory, Fishergate.*

# *Where was it found & what happened to it?*

**The York Museum Trust accession record says:**

***1951/58: Gold Ring - Anglian. Human head with two opposite animal bodies.***

***“Found on site of the Glass Factory Fishergate, some 20 years ago, said to have been found on the finger of a skeleton.”***

***“Presented on behalf of Henry Ernest Leetham Esq. JP. ‘Aldersyde’, Dringhouses, York through his daughters;***

***Mrs. Ethel Robinson, ‘Aldersyde’, Dringhouses, York,***

***Mrs. Constance Terry, Harvest Hill, Braywick, Maidenhead,***

***Mrs Kathleen Terry, ‘Goddards’, Dringhouses, York”***

# *What happened to the ring?*

**Who was Henry Ernest Leetham JP?**

***Leetham was a very prominent figure in York.***

***He was owner of Leetham's huge flour mill in Hungate and was a director of Terry's.***

***However, he died in 1923, so it is a mystery as to why his daughters presented the ring "...on behalf of [him]"***

***Perhaps the ring was found at the glassworks and the owner gave it to one of the sisters, knowing that she had inherited their father's collection of jade and other precious objects?***

# What happened to the ring?

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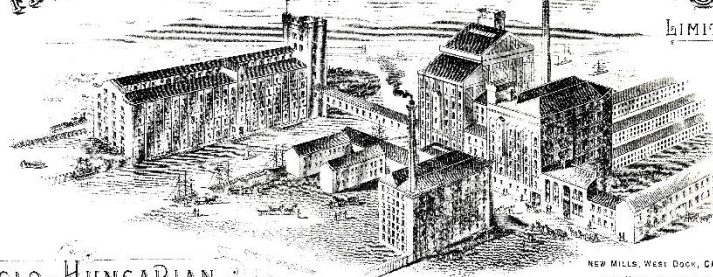
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Telegraphic Address - "LEETHAM, YORK."

TELEPHONE NO

HENRY LEETHAM & SONS, LIMITED



ANGLO-HUNGARIAN  
ROLLER FLOUR MILLS  
YORK

NEW MILLS, WEST DOCK, CARDIFF.  
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CARDIFF .. .. . No. 1045.

5th May, 1902.

190

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# *What happened to the ring?*

**Who were the Leetham sisters?**

***Ethel married Aiden Robinson, who became a director of Terry's and lived at Aldersyde, the home of her father, who left it in trust to his 3 daughters.***

***She stayed there until 1957, when she moved to live closer to her sister at Goddards.***

***Kathleen married Noel Terry, Chairman of Joseph Terry & Son and lived at Goddards.***

***Her daughter Betty, says she has no recollection of the ring being mentioned in the family.***

***Constance married Noel's older brother Harold and lived at Maidenhead. He was not involved in the family business.***

# *What happened to the ring?*

**What prompted the sisters to hand in the ring in 1951, some 20 years after it had been found?**

- *Was it because of the York history pageants, held as part of the Festival of Britain?*
- *Was it just because one of the sisters was having a 'clear-out'?*
- *Had they heard of another donation to the museum and remembered the ring?*

# Questions, Questions....!

***After all that, we still don't know:-***

- ***When it was made***
- ***Who it was made for***
- ***Why it was buried in Fishergate***
- ***Where, when or why it was found***
- ***Why it was given to a Leetham sister***
- ***Why the sisters handed it in in 1951***



***Can you shed any light on the mystery?***

# *Some more Pre-Norman rings*



***Another ring found in  
Fishergate***



***Anglo-Scandinavian  
ring from Yorkshire***



***The Escrick Ring  
5/6<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup>  
Century?***



***Anglo-Scandinavian  
ring***



***Anglian ring from Saffron  
Walden***