

Ashmolean Museum Acquires A Hoard Of Angels This Christmas

07 December 2010

Today, the Ashmolean Museum is delighted to announce the acquisition of a spectacular Tudor hoard of 210 English gold angels and half-angel coins, found in the Cotswolds, Oxfordshire.

Image



Dame Jenny Abramsky, Chair of NHMF, holding one of the coins from the hoard

Spanning the period from 1470-1526, covering the Wars of the Roses to ten years before the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the hoard is the largest intact assemblage of its kind. It contains some rare pieces, most notably from the reign of Kings Henry VI, 2nd reign (1470-1471) and Richard III (1483-1485).

The Ashmolean successfully secured more than half of the hoard's asking price through private, philanthropic giving with the remaining monies raised through government funding and grants from public sources. Over and above the £64,000 from National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), the following helped to raise the money: £28,000 from The MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund; £10,000 from The Headley Trust; and £178,000 from the following: Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Seaman; Baron Lorne Thyssen-Bornemisza; The Mougins Museum of Classical Art; The Carl and Eileen Subak Family Foundation; The Friends of the Ashmolean; The

Elias Ashmole Group; The Tradescant Patrons Group.

Dr Christopher Brown, Director of the Ashmolean, said “We are extremely grateful to the individuals and funding bodies for their very generous contributions towards this remarkable hoard. Not only will the hoard be a great addition to our renowned collection but it makes a significant contribution to the history of Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds, and to our understanding of the production and circulation of gold coinage in the early Tudor period.”

Dame Jenny Abramsky, Chair of the NHMF, said: “This is clearly an inspirational collection. That it has now been saved for future generations to enjoy is testament to how private philanthropy, government funds such as the National Heritage Memorial Fund and public funding bodies can effectively come together to secure our most important heritage treasures.”

Jeremy Hunt MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, said: “This is great news. Safeguarding this rare collection shows how philanthropy, with the support of Government money through NHMF and additional corporate subsidy, can come together to help protect our rich and irreplaceable heritage for everyone’s benefit and for all time.”

The hoard was discovered in the summer of 2007 during building work in the village of Asthall, near Burford. It was declared Treasure in April 2010 and was valued by Treasure Valuation Committee at £280,000 on 12 August. It was unearthed on land which belonged to Eton College at the turn of the sixteenth century. The Tudor gold was buried in the early period of Henry VIII (1509-1547); it is possible this was connected to the hiding of Church wealth, in the context of the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII. Alternatively, it may represent a merchant’s wealth - whatever the reason, the Asthall hoard is testimony to the accumulation of wealth in the region, made particularly rich from the wool trade.

Angels and half-angels were first minted in 1465, bearing the Archangel Michael slaying the dragon on the obverse. It has been suggested that this is an allegory of the overthrow of Lancaster by York. European culture in the fifteenth century was a time of chivalry and lay piety. This religious theme continues on the reverse design, where the traditional ship borne by the gold nobles since 1344 is super-imposed by a cross, and by the inscriptions: Per Crucem Tuam Salva Nos Christe Redemptor: - Through thy cross save us, Christ Redeemer (on the angels); O Crux Ave Spes Unica - Hail! O Cross, our only hope (on the half-angels).

In the second half of the fifteenth century, the introduction of the angel with its overtly pious message coincided with the popular practice of the Royal Touch. Since medieval times, kings have been involved in the healing of tuberculosis of the neck (scrofula, the King's Evil), a practice which involved touching (Royal Touch), and the giving of alms in the shape of coins. Touch pieces retained the design of angel coins for centuries.

Following conservation, the hoard will go on display in a special exhibition in the Ashmolean's new Money Gallery for a year from 22 March 2011. It will become a key part of the Museum's permanent collection of coins, one of the leading currency collections in the world.

Notes to editors

The MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund

[The MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund](#) is a government fund, established at the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) in 1881 as part of its nationwide work. The annual grants budget, currently £900,000, is provided by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). The Fund supports the acquisition of objects relating to the arts, literature and history by regional museums, record offices and specialist libraries in England and Wales.

Each year, the Purchase Grant Fund considers some 250 applications and awards grants to around 100 organisations, enabling acquisitions of around £3million to go ahead.

The Headley Museums Archaeological Acquisition Fund

[The Headley Museums Archaeological Acquisition Fund](#) has been established by the Headley Trust, one of the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts. Its trustees realise the great difficulties many regional and local museums find in raising the money to buy archaeological artefacts. They are also aware of the proliferation of finds as a consequence of the success of the Portable Antiquities Scheme. The Headley initiative is intended to help museums secure and display notable finds. The Headley Scheme runs alongside and in collaboration with the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund.

The Ashmolean

The Ashmolean houses one of the leading coin collections in the world, comprising of some three hundred thousand coins and medals. The collection goes back to the seventeenth century, although the Coin Room itself was opened only in 1922. Its particular strengths feature Greek, Roman, Celtic, Byzantine, Medieval, Islamic, Indian, and Chinese coinages. In addition there are holdings of paper money, tokens, jetons, and commemorative and art medals. The Coin Room enjoys a dual role as a major international cabinet and as a department of the University of Oxford. This fruitful conjunction has helped us to develop the Coin Room into a centre for the teaching of numismatics and monetary history of worldwide significance. Since the re-opening of the Museum in 2009 the Coin Room includes a major new Money Gallery, an environmentally controlled and highly secure Coin Store, a well-appointed Coin Study Room for visitors and for numismatic teaching.

Further information

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