

The Havering Ring: A National Treasure



Like many 19th century finds in The British Museum's collections the only recorded circumstances of discovery is the phrase in the register 'Found at Havering-atte-Bower, Essex'. We can say more about the ring and the gem, gold and nicolo paste respectively and both dating to the fourth century, and much more about the subject matter of the intaglio: the finely-cut scene is of a famous and very ancient bit of pagan mythology – the hero Bellerophon riding the



winged horse Pegasus and spearing the monster Chimaera (whose front part was a lion, back part a snake and middle a she-goat). The spearhead is thrust into the lion's mouth and, as is often the case, the she-goat's head can just be made out rising from the monster's back. The legend was well-known and the scene is common in classical art way back into early Greek imagery but as far as I am aware this is the only example of it on a gem from Roman Britain. It is even more interesting because the imagery was adapted by early Christians as a symbol of the triumph of Good over Evil and the scene is found in Christian contexts in several places in Britain – at the villas of Lullingstone and Frampton and, most famously, in the lesser panel of the 'Christ' mosaic from Hinton St Mary, Dorset. So, tantalisingly, the wearer of the Havering ring may have been a devout pagan or just as likely a devout Christian.

The ring was purchased from a NF Davey in 1869. It is a 4th Century ring.

The ring is on loan to Havering Museum from The British Museum until January 2011.

Havering Museum is open Wednesday to Friday, 12noon to 5pm and Saturday 11am to 5pm.

Admission charge applies

Havering Museum, The Brewery Gate, 19 – 21 High Street, Romford, RM1 1JU

Tel: 08452 707 737 www.haveringmuseum.org.uk