

A PIECE OF SAXON HISTORY FOR MODERN DAY WEAR

More than 1,400 years after it was made by a Saxon jeweller, a ring discovered buried in a Somerset garden has been recreated by modern jeweller Erica Sharpe.

The original was found 18 years ago in the garden of a house in Wedmore, near Cheddar and at the time was featured in a programme by the Channel 4's Time Team.

The ring has an unusual knot and was probably a gift from a lord to his servant. It has been identified by the British Museum as a copper alloy man's finger ring dating from the sixth to seventh century AD. Although Wedmore was a site of special significance to King Alfred, no other item of jewellery has ever been found. It was custom for Saxon Kings to reward their most beloved companion for loyalty with such a ring.

Now Wedmore jeweller and goldsmith Erica Sharpe has created a perfect replica of the original in gold. It's the first in an individually numbered edition which will also include replicas in platinum and silver.

The 'Wedmore Ring' was unveiled at a special Saxon evening in November last year when the original went on public display for the first time.

Erica, whose studio is in the Borough Mall, worked to create her replica with the owner of the original ring. She was asked to do the work because of her expertise in wirework. Erica replicated the design and wirework pattern of the Saxon ring and has resulted in a lot of commissions.

When the original ring went on public display for the first time in Erica's studio, it attracted hundreds of people wanting to see this piece of history.

"The original ring has captured the imagination of people and they have particularly responded to the story behind it," said Erica.

"It is the only ring of its kind in existence because of the unique knot and people like the fact that a replica has now been made by a local jeweller in the same village where the original was found."

"I've set out to be true to how it was made, creating the ring out of two pieces of wire," she said. "It is an unusual knot and I've handmade it in the same way using my own hand tools which are similar to what would have been originally used."

At the launch of the Wedmore ring - the replica of the Saxon ring - Erica held a Saxon evening where she recreated a Saxon jewellery workshop. During her research she discovered that Saxon jewellers were highly skilled. Goldsmiths and jewellers were highly regarded and allowed to concentrate solely on

their craft. Through their art they experimented, created and worked artistic patterns.

Erica also discovered while working with the original design that the Saxon jeweller would have been right handed.

"The natural way of twisting the knot for a right-handed person is the way the original would have been made. When I work with the design I've had to think quite hard about it because I am left handed and had to create the knot in reverse," she said.

Like a Saxon jeweller, Erica makes most of her work tools. She virtually used the same tools as the Saxon jeweller would have to create the ring.

She added: "I felt quite emotional when I saw the original ring and held it for the first time. I knew this was extremely special and was struck by the parallels that a Saxon jeweller had made their living from creating in the same way as I do."

"It is really exciting to create a little piece of Wedmore history for modern day wear," added Erica.



Wedmore Ring: Jeweller and goldsmith Erica Sharpe with her replica of an original Saxon ring discovered in a Wedmore garden.