

16th-century Sheriff's ring discovered. (see photo below)

24-carat gold mourning ring belonging to Hugh Audley discovered by metal detector enthusiast from Norfolk

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A ring belonging to a wealthy 16th century Londoner and former Sheriff of Norfolk, who owned the land where Buckingham Palace now stands, has been found in a field. The 7g, 24 carat gold mourning ring belonging to Hugh Audley was discovered by John Reed, of Tibbenham, Norfolk, while out with his metal detector in December. It was recorded as treasure trove by Coroner Jacqueline Lake at an inquest in Norwich on Wednesday. Mr Reed, who only started metal detecting last summer, said the clear inscriptions on the ring made it easy to research its history. He said: "I am so excited about it. I have found some lovely 13th Century thimbles but not something you can associate with a specific person like this. "If I keep metal detecting for the next 20 years, I don't think I will ever find anything as good as this." Baptised in 1577, Hugh Audley started his career with £100 and died age 86 with a fortune of more than £400,000.

Audley worked as a philosopher, a lawyer and a money lender - the latter making his wealth - and owned land across London's Mayfair. Hugh Audley also bought property in south Norfolk, including Old Buckenham Castle, New Buckenham Castle and Tibbenham Hall.

Known as "The Great" Audley, he had roads in central London named after him and he was appointed sheriff of Norfolk.

Mr. Reed said a mourning ring is given as a memory of the person who made it.

"According to Mr Audley's will, he had 11 rings made in two different sizes - one to fit men and the other for women," he said.

"I haven't heard that any others are in existence,"

As Mr Audley had no children of his own, the rings were passed down to his great nephews - with one selling his share to the other.

The great nephew then died aged 29 and left his entire fortune, including the rings to his six-month-old baby daughter Mary Davis.

Aged 12, Mary married Sir Thomas Grosvenor, 3rd Baronet, Member of Parliament and ancestor of the current Dukes of Westminster.

The mourning ring is currently at the British Museum. [It was found by detectorist John Reed who lives in Tibbenham in Norfolk.]

