

Gold finds from Assistens Kirkegård

By archaeologist Lars Haugesten

To this date there are located 62 rings at Assistens, most of them have stamps of different kinds. But what are stamped on the rings and what does this tell us?

The rings are often found with inscriptions and finds. The inscriptions consist of the individual or spouse and the date and the year of marriage. The stamps can be carat, jeweller/producer and in several cases the city and assayer mark. As most people know 24 carat means pure gold, of which one carat is 1/24 gold. 18 carat rings is 750/1000 alloy of gold, 14 carat rings is 585/1000 alloy of gold and 8 carat rings is 333/1000 alloy of gold. The city mark was a quality brand that showed that the product had the right amount of alloy and where it was produced. The city mark of Copenhagen was a reproduction of the three towers from the city coat of arms (Sølver 1929: 191).



Ring with Copenhagen city stamp

The assayers' task was to secure that the product was of good quality and that the ring had the right amount of alloy. The rings which have the assay stamp can easily be dated to a certain time period since there have only been 15 assayers from 1679 to 1977. Furthermore every assay stamp is unique, so there is no major problem to recognize them. The city mark and the assay mark were always stamped together on the ring.

Most of the rings are made of gold, but some of the rings are made of regular metal, close to nine of them. 12 gold rings don't have stamps to prove what the carat of the ring is. The remainders are distributed in 18 or 14 carat. It's not necessarily to be 18 or 14 stamp, it could also be a 750 or 585 stamp.

There are many different jewellers stamps and it's a big job to find the exact manufacturer, and it's often that jewellers use the same abbreviations, which complicates the process to find the right jeweller. Still, some jewellers are easier to obtain information about such as H. Niebuhr & Søn, guldsmedeværksted (F13819). One gold ring had these four stamps: G&N, 750, 18K, G&N.



Ring showing detail of G&N stamp and 750 stamp

Unlike most of the other gold rings it has two stamps of the same jeweller and two stamps of the carat, G&N stands for Frit Alfr. Grim and Helmuth Reinhard Niebuhr. They had a shop on Gothersgade 17 in Copenhagen and the company was founded 11. December 1890 (Kraak – Danmarks ældste forretninger 1950:423). Another ring had engraved TBK 30-06-09 with a 750 and AD stamp (F8839). AD is an abbreviation for Arent Dragsted and he founded his company A. Dragsted A/S 30. November 1854 (Kraak – Danmarks ældste forretninger 1950:141). He died in 1898 so it had to be one of the later employees of the company which created the ring in his initials. They kept their shop and head office near H. Niebuhr & Son, more precisely Bredgade 17 and 19.



Ring showing detail of 750 stamp and AD stamp

The three towers mark is, as mentioned above, a stamp from the city coat of arms. The year when the stamp was made can be seen below the three towers with some exceptions. 21 rings found on the Assistens had the three towers mark,

they vary in appearance as a new stamp was made every year, but the motive was the same. Several of the rings had engraved the year of marriage and this agrees with the year during the three towers mark.

The rings which were stamped with the three towers mark should always have an assay stamp. There have been few assayers and most of the rings on Assistens is from the 1900-century, making it quite easy to recognize the individual assay mark. In the case for Assistens there are found two different assay marks. The older of these two is Peter Reimer Hinnerup. He was the assayer from 1840 to 1863. The second assay is Simon Chr. Sch. Groth and he was the assayer from 1863 to 1904.

Most of the rings found at the Assistens were wedding rings, in some cases; an individual had two wedding rings, suggesting that when the spouse died the survivor wore both rings. Something that confirms this is the modification of the rings; they were either expanded or made smaller. But some rings are clearly not wedding rings, but engagement rings or for just "decoration". Especially those of metal can be classified as other than wedding rings, but again the economy may have led to thrifty wedding rings, so any conclusions must be taken with care. It might also explain the few discoveries of rings compared with number of buried, they were either too expensive or they were given as inheritance.

It turns out that the rings found at Assistens can give us interesting and useful information, which may help to identify the buried ones and give social knowledge from the 1800-century.