

**Eden Valley Museum**  
**OBJECT OF THE MONTH APRIL 2023**



**Ornamental Horse Pendant, medieval**

Decorative pendants have been hung from horse bridles from at least as early as Roman times as several have been found from that era.

In the medieval period, dating from the 11th-15th century, the fashion for horse pendants became widespread. They were usually made of copper-alloy, sometimes gilded or tinned to make them shine.

Initially, only wealthy knights would own horses and they ornamented the bridles with pendants embossed or enamelled with their heraldic symbols. Knights who went on Crusade seem to have returned with trophy pendants taken from horses of 'the Infidels' and various crescent shaped and highly decorative pendants made in the East have been found in Britain. As the ownership of horses spread officials holding offices of state would embellish the pendants with the symbols of their office.

As horse ownership became widespread, the fashion for ornamenting the bridles spread too. Those who had no right to wear heraldic symbols or emblazon symbols of offices of state, took to using simple shapes or bells of various sizes which became particularly popular.

In Chaucer's Canterbury tales of the 1380's, he describes the Prior with:

*'His bridle, when he rode, a man might hear  
Jingling in the whistling wind as clear,  
Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell,  
Where my lord Monk was Prior of the cell.'*

Over time the ornaments took on an additional meaning, used as an amulet to ward off evil and protect against the 'evil eye'. By wearing a thing of beauty, it was believed the ornament deflected the evil away from the intended victim and therefore gave protection.

The horse pendant now on display at the museum was found in Chiddingstone. It is made of copper-alloy and enamelled and dates from 13th-14th century. It shows a bishop's mitre with lappets hanging down which implies that this traveller was a bishop or one of his most senior associates. Given its proximity it is most likely to have belonged to the Bishop of Rochester, as Chiddingstone falls within his diocese. It could also possibly have belonged to the more powerful Archbishop of Canterbury and fell off as he travelled towards London.

**Visit the museum to view this delicate object on display along with other local discoveries in our ground floor gallery.**