Ring

Place of origin: England (possibly, made)
Date: 17th century (made)
Artist/Maker: Unknown
Materials and Techniques: Engraved silver
Credit Line: Bequeathed by Lt. Col. G. B. Croft-Lyons FSA
Museum number: M.816-1926
Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description
A decade ring was used in the same way as a rosary. The wearer would use this ring in prayer, saying a 'Hail Mary' or Ave Maria for each knob on the ring and, for the centre of the ring, an 'Our Father' or Paternoster. The sequence of prayers encouraged the devout to meditate upon events in the life of Christ and the Virgin. Rosaries had been prohibited in England from 1538 and the prohibition extended in the 1547 Injunctions and by a statute of 1571 which forbade signs of overt Catholicism such as 'any Agnus Dei, cross, picture, [rosary] bead, or such superstitious thing from the See of Rome'. However decade rings, not explicitly condemned, continued to be made and worn by ‘recusant’ Catholics who refused to embrace the new Protestant practices.

The letters IHS on the bezel are a Christogram based on the first three letters of the name Jesus in Greek. This abbreviation was given particular prominence from the 15th century by the Franciscan preacher Saint Bernadino of Siena. He persuaded warring Italian city states to lay down their arms and replace them with banners bearing the letters IHS. It could also be understood as the name 'Iesus Hominum Salvator' (Jesus the Saviour of Mankind). The three nails engraved under the letters IHS refer to those used for the Crucifixion and would have served to remind the wearer of Christ's suffering. Wearing a ring with Christian symbols was an outward sign of faith and allowed the wearer to incorporate their religious devotions into daily life.

Descriptive line
Silver 'decade ring' with an oval bezel engraved with the sacred monogram, possibly England, 17th century

Physical description
Silver 'decade ring' with an oval bezel engraved with the sacred monogram

Dimensions
Height: 3.2 cm, Width: 3.1 cm, Depth: 0.9 cm

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Object history note
A very similar decade ring engraved with IHS under a cross and three nails is in the Norwich castle museum collection and two others are in the British Museum (Dalton 1912, 799 and 800)

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O121176/ring-unknown/