

Report on the Portable Antiquities Recording Scheme

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FINDS REPORTED TO THE PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME IN 2015

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015 a total of 2,770 finds from Somerset² were recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) in 1,600 records.

- The recorded finds were of all periods from the Palaeolithic to c. AD 1900, with the following breakdown, based on number of records rather than objects³: Palaeolithic: <1%, Mesolithic: 6%, Neolithic: 7%, Bronze Age: 2%, Iron Age: 1%, Roman: 35%, Early-Medieval: 1%, Medieval: 17%, Post-Medieval: 31%, and Modern: <1%. <1% were of unknown period⁴.
- They were made from a range of materials including metal: 77% (of which copper alloys 74%), pottery: 8%, and worked stone: 15%.
- Most finds were discovered whilst metal detecting (88%), including 11% as 'eyes only' surface finds; others were discovered by people out walking, gardening or as other chance finds.

Many other finds examined by the Somerset Finds Liaison Officers and colleagues were not recorded – generally finds that post-date AD 1700. Those described below are a selection that are significant, either nationally or locally. Complete records of all finds recorded, with colour photographs, can be viewed on the PAS online database: finds.org.uk/database.

PRINCIPAL FINDS

Neolithic polished axehead from Exford (SOM-CE09D9)

A Neolithic flint polished axehead (Fig. 1) dating to the period c. 2750–2350 BC. The axehead is sub-ovate, with a thin butt, and is lenticular in cross-section. It has been bifacially worked, with flaking scars covering both faces. The cutting edge has been ground and polished to remove the majority

of flaking scars. The technique of polishing out flake scars is labour intensive, but has been proven to extend the longevity of the object, making it less prone to breakage. Where polishing occurs on the body, it is a purely aesthetic choice and may hint at a more ceremonial function, or purely a more prestigious rank in society. The cutting edge is asymmetric, indicating that it has been re-sharpened after use. The blade exhibits a small nick in the tip, the patination of which indicates that this may have also occurred during use.

Although polished axeheads seem to have often had a ritual or ceremonial role, the fact that polishing was restricted to the cutting edge, combined with the evidence for use and re-sharpening suggest that this was a functional tool. The flint is not a local resource and indicates careful sourcing and management of materials.

The axehead measures 132.13mm in length, 68.38mm maximum width, 22.71mm minimum width, 18.57mm maximum thickness, 2.14mm minimum thickness and weighs 203g.



Fig. 1 Axehead from Exford

Iron Age sword pommel from Ruishton (SOM-088DFF)

A copper-alloy human head shaped pommel (Fig. 2). The head is moulded in three dimensions with a large slit running transversely across it which opens up at the base. Incised lines and slight moulding pick out the eyes, nose and mouth. Below the chin the neck ends in an old break across an attachment hole. Above the face is a woven band running along the hairline which may indicate a decorative band or plaited or bound hair. Behind the band the hair is in combed lines running straight back to a plain band at the back with a central knot, perhaps a small bun or net or further decorative band. A hole in the top of the head, through into the slit, is irregular and off-centre and may be damage or a damaged attachment hole.

The piece is 32.8mm tall, 21.7mm wide, 23.9mm thick and weighs 39.40g.

The head would have sat over the end of a sword hilt, flanked by projecting arms, a design categorised as anthropoid. It is very closely paralleled in form and design by examples found attached to hilts from North Grimston, North Yorkshire, from an unprovenanced location and from Holme Hale, Norfolk (Stead 2006: 196-7 and fig. 107, nos.215, 216 and 219), dated to the late 2nd to 1st century BC.



Fig. 2 Pommel from Ruishton

Late Iron Age handle escutcheon from Dinnington (SOM-41CB43)

A copper-alloy escutcheon (handle attachment) from the rim of a bowl (Fig. 3). It consists of a broadly oval front plate, arched out in profile. From the back extends a Y-shaped fitting. The broken stem of the Y would have gone through the vessel wall just below the rim as an attachment rivet. Between the arms of the Y and the front plate is a worn hole for the ring handle. The front would have concealed the attachment with the handle hanging down below it. The front plate has a raised bar along the centre decorated with incised grooves. From the sides and ends of the bar extend D-shaped extensions (lips or skirts). Those on the ends are almost flat and would have sat against the vessel wall. The side extensions are separated from the bar by a deep groove but then angle up to the outer edge so the centre of the each outer edge is level with the top of the bar.

The entire piece is 31.6mm long, 17.3mm wide and 17.2mm thick; it weighs 14.35g.

Parallels are discussed by Spratling (1972: 222–223, fig. 177), in particular no.386, from Ham Hill, Somerset, no.283 from Bagendon, Gloucestershire and no.387 from Hod Hill, Dorset, and dated to the early 1st century AD and possibly earlier. Jope (2000: plate 167) illustrates an elongated example in situ on a vessel from Rose Ash, Devon. Given this latest find we suggest there is potentially a South Western distribution to this particular type.



Fig. 3 Handle escutcheon from Dinnington

Roman nummus from Kingsdon (SOM-DA006B)

A copper-alloy Roman *nummus* of Constantius II (Fig. 4) dating to the year AD 353. The reverse carries the legend SALVS AVG NOSTRI and depicts a Christogram flanked by Alpha and Omega. The period during which this coin was minted was a particularly tumultuous. Although the coin is minted in the name of Constantius II, the reverse type is of one usually attributed to a British usurper, Magnentius, who took control of the Western Empire, including Britain, between AD 350 and 353. Little is known of Magnentius, save that he is believed to have had an English father and a French mother. Despite his initial popularity, Magnentius suffered a string of defeats and eventually committed suicide. This coin was minted in the city of Trier, Germany, after the city declared against him in favour of Constantius II, changing the portraiture on the coinage to reflect this, but retaining the reverse designs of Magnentius. This coin represents a snapshot in time covering a matter of months in AD 353 leading up to the suicide of Magnentius and restoration of Constantius II as emperor of the West.

The coin has a diameter of 23.97mm and weighs 4.93g.



Fig. 4 Nummus from Kingsdon

Roman vessel from Charlton Mackerell (SOM-34C374)

A ceramic base sherd from a Roman Samian ware vessel (Fig. 5) dating to the period c. AD 120–260. The sherd consists of a circular foot ring with the remains of the floor of the vessel projecting at a shallow angle from the top of the foot ring and terminating in old breaks around the entire circumference. The fabric is a buff orange colour

and is fully oxidised. It is hard and exhibits frequent micaceous inclusions. The vessel has been coated in a dark orange/brown slip which has been heavily abraded in places. The fabric suggests that the vessel derives from the central Gaulish Lezoux production centre.

A maker's stamp is visible on the basal interior and appears to read CAN[...]VVI, surrounded by an impressed circle. It is possibly attributable to the potter Camulo, however, the mark is incomplete due to abrasion.

The sherd measures 58.26mm in length, is 55.66mm wide and 17.31mm in height. The walls are 5.91mm thick and it weighs 38.82g.

The shallow angle between the wall and the floor of the vessel, combined with the fabric and the maker's mark suggest that the sherd is probably from a bowl or dish of Dragendorff Type 18/31R (Webster, 1996: 33).



Fig. 5 Vessel from Charlton Mackerell

Early-Medieval object, probably a mount, from Easton-in-Gordano (SOM-612E06)

The copper-alloy object is a flat pelta shaped plate with moulded front and flat back and one remaining integral rivet (Fig. 6). The outer two extensions are animal heads which look inwards so their open jaws flank a human head on the central extension. The human head is simply moulded with incised lines indicating the features and prominent semicircular ears. The upper (crescentic) part is decorated with large angular recessed fields surrounded by narrower recessed channels. The larger fields hold extensive remains of yellow enamel, while in the channels are small fragments of red enamel. There is an irregular, worn break in the centre of the top edge where it is thought the item would have been suspended or attached although the precise function remains unclear. The piece measures 39.8mm in width, is 35.7mm long, 6.9mm thick excluding the rivet, 11.1mm including it and weighs 17.71g.

Susan Youngs (pers. comm.) commented that the enamel design is typical of Irish enamelling of the 8th century onwards. A human head with prominent ears between profile animals with open jaws is paralleled on 8th century Irish metalwork, mostly demonstrably religious (Youngs and Craddock 1989: 105 and 165, Cat. 91 and 137). This piece is probably Irish, dating to the late 8th or 9th centuries, and spoila from Viking raids, circulating in the early Viking period.

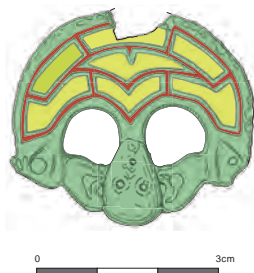


Fig. 6 Object, probably a mount, from Easton-in-Gordano.

Drawing by Mike Trevarthen

Medieval stone sculpture from Wells (SOM-761EB7)

This upper torso fragment of a sculpture of an unidentified secular figure (Fig. 7) probably dating to c.AD 1320–1400 was found during building works. The fragment is of a tunic and mantle clad figure with their lost right arm bent forward at the elbow. Traces of red paint survive on the mantle which is draped over the shoulders and across the body in wide diagonal folds at the waist. The tunic has a fairly deeply indented trapezoid neckline



Fig. 7 Sculpture from Wells

suggesting the figure was male. The fragment is oval in cross-section with a convex back. The back and sides are plain, with some working marks, suggesting it was designed to sit in a niche. The stone is oolitic, probably Bath stone. The fragment is c.200mm long, c.140mm wide and c.70mm thick; the scale suggests that the whole piece was upwards of 600mm high, half to a third life-size. Dr Jerry Sampson (pers. comm.) commented on the piece and suggested the use of Bath stone, straight pose, and form of the folding, may indicate a mid to later 14th century date.

Medieval mount from Milverton (SOM-3E316A)

A complete gilded copper-alloy finial with an integral rivet for attachment to a vessel, casket or other item (Fig. 8). The finial is in the form of a quadruped, probably a dog or a lion, standing on four legs with its head turned to one side, on a sub-rectangular flat base with an eagle clutching the animals shoulder and jaws in its claws. The piece is finely moulded throughout with details carefully picked out with incised lines. On the sides of the eagle's head are inlaid circular glass eyes. While the possible lines on the neck suggest the quadruped is a lion, the pointed ears, blunt tail and turned out feet with toes all suggest a dog.

The finial is 33.9mm tall, 22.3mm excluding the eagle, 18.4mm long from the quadruped's front to the back and 10.9mm wide from side to side. It weighs 12.48g.

The Romanesque style of the animals, use of finely detailed gilded copper alloy and inlaid glass eyes suggests a date in or around the 12th century, c.1050–1250 AD. It is clearly from a high status object but is not paralleled in the usual sources. BERK-531C90 on the PAS database is reminiscent in the form of the rivet and use of zoomorphic decoration.

Post-Medieval whistle from West Crewkerne (SOM-B8F871, Treasure case 2015 T490)

A tubular sheet silver whistle (Fig. 9) dating to c. AD 1500–1650. Two collars composed of spiralled silver wire divide the whistle into three sections. The middle section is decorated with a grid of punched squares creating a lattice effect. Upon this grid is a zig-zag panel. The panel contains a raised motif of alternating roses and pomegranates, each of which is separated by a pellet. There is a band with a similar motif running around the whistle to one



Fig. 8 Mount from Milverton

end of the middle section. Soldered over the seam, is a small silver wire loop that secures a silver ring for suspension. The foot section is slightly squashed and has a collar consisting of a cabled band running around the open end.

The whistle measures 55.64mm in length, 4.84mm in diameter at the mouthpiece, widening to 8.74mm at the tip. It weighs 6.24g.

Such items are commonly termed as hawking or huntsman's whistles. A number of silver hunting whistles of this type have been recorded on the PAS database and submitted as Treasure, IOW-954403 (2005 T96), NMS-CBE4B1 (2012 T875),

DENO-C41762 (2014 T196) and SUR-FB1264 (2010 T436); this example is unusual in being complete, if damaged.

Post-Medieval mount from Pitminster (SOM-A9F568)

A post-medieval copper-alloy heraldic boss from a dish or basin (Fig. 10), dating to the period c.AD 1603–1650. The mount is circular and convex, and bears the crest of the House of Stuart. This consists of a shield bearing the Stuart arms, encircled by a band which probably bears the motto HONI SOIT



Fig. 9 Whistle from West Crewkerne

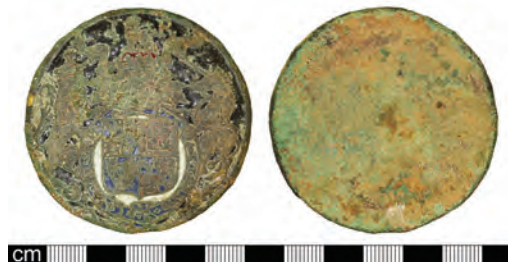


Fig. 10 Mount from Pitminster

QUI MAL Y PENSE, but is now very worn. Both the shield and the band have the remains of inlaid blue enamel, with traces of red enamel also present on the shield. The space between them is filled with white enamel. A unicorn supports the shield to the right and a crowned lion supports it to the left. A crowned helmet, exhibiting red and blue enamel, surmounts the shield and is flanked by feathers. The crown is in turn surmounted by a crowned lion. The initials 'I' and 'R' flank the crowned lion, and represent 'Iacobus Rex' for James I of England. The field is inlaid with black enamel, while the crest has the remains of gilding on the surface where the enamel is not present. The enamel field is surrounded by a raised metal reserve around the edge of the boss.

The boss is 57.40mm in diameter, 2.20mm in thickness and weighs 31.65g.

Cottrell (1929: 121) and Davis (2003: 32) suggest that this boss may have been placed centrally inside a dish or basin and may have been a royal gift rather than belonging to the royal household. It would probably have been used for display or as a rosewater dish for washing hands, rather than for the service of food.

Endnotes

- ¹ finds@swheritage.org.uk
- ² The figures given are for the historic county of Somerset including North Somerset, and Bath and North East Somerset.
- ³ This under represents flint and pottery and periods when these are heavily represented.
- ⁴ Mostly material such as lead weights or metal-working debris that are inherently hard to date out of context.

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