

Report on Portable Antiquities Recording Scheme 2016

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FINDS REPORTED TO THE PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME IN 2016

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INTRODUCTION

In 2016 a total of 2,671 finds from Somerset¹ were recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) in 1,521 records.

- The recorded finds were of all periods from the Mesolithic to c. AD 1900, with the following breakdown, based on number of records rather than objects²: Palaeolithic: none, Mesolithic: 4%, Neolithic: 3%, Bronze Age: 1%, Iron Age: 1%, Roman: 48%, Early-Medieval: <1%, Medieval: 17%, Post-Medieval: 25%, and Modern: <1%. <1% were of unknown period³.
- They were made from a range of materials including metal: 83% (of which copper alloys 77%), pottery: 9%, and worked stone: 7%.
- Most finds were discovered whilst metal detecting (94%), including 10% as ‘eyes only’ surface finds; others were discovered by people out walking, gardening or as other chance finds.

The most notable find reported to the scheme this year was a Roman lead ingot (pig) from Westbury (SOM-23F798), discussed elsewhere in this volume. Many other finds examined by the Somerset Finds Liaison Officers and colleagues were not recorded – generally finds that post-date AD 1540. Those described below are a selection that are significant, either nationally or locally. Complete records of all finds recorded can be viewed on the PAS online database: finds.org.uk/database.

PRINCIPAL FINDS

Bronze Age - Iron Age unidentified object from Shepton Beauchamp (SOM-2867B7)

This copper-alloy object belongs to a group usually called ‘moustache’ shaped objects (Fig. 1). It is formed of two conjoined pointed ovals, arranged



Fig. 1 Unidentified object from Shepton Beauchamp

at a 120 degree angle with faint striations running down both and a deep oval indent in the join between them. The entire piece is 32.3mm long, 10.5mm wide and 16.3mm deep; it weighs 13.79g.

These objects are thought to have been used as dagger pommels and guards although until one is found in relation to a blade this is only a tentative suggestion as they do not seem to fit with the known tangs of most Bronze Age daggers. The dating is also unclear: an example was found in the Salisbury Hoard (Stead 1998), a mixed hoard with Middle Bronze Age material deposited in the Iron Age, and others are known, out of context, from Middle Bronze Age sites, at Methwold, Norfolk (Norfolk HER 5235) and Clay Farm, Cambridgeshire (Mortimer and Philips 2012, 128 and 245 fig. 10, SF152) but these sites also have later material.

The recording of over 45 examples through the PAS in the last 20 years has, however, built a corpus that will allow researchers to understand more of their range of forms and therefore possible use. This example is the first known from Somerset and possibly the most westerly known example.

Iron Age unidentified object from Westonzoyland (SOM-941611)

A copper-alloy Iron Age anthropomorphic object dating to c. 300 BC–AD 43 in the form of a human head and neck moulded three dimensionally with facial features indicated by moulding and engraving (Fig. 2). At the top of the head are a series of incised grooves creating a chevron pattern, possibly indicating braided hair or a hood. At the base of the neck is a ridge incised with a series of diagonal grooves, possibly indicating the collar of a garment, or a torc. The neck appears to have extended beyond this but now ends in old breaks on all sides. The back of the head and neck are recessed and partially filled with iron corrosion product. This recess extends down under the centre of the neck suggesting a hollow socket. The object measures 31.6mm in length, 14.3mm in width, 24.8mm thick and weighs 27.53g.

Although the precise function of this object is unknown, it bears similarities to a razor handle from Little Missenden, Buckinghamshire (Worrell 2005, 458) and an object from Kingsbridge, Devon (Worrell 2007, 336). Sally Worrell (pers. comm.) has commented that, in style, both the Kingsbridge piece and the Westonzoyland example follow the Iron Age tradition, but show elements of Roman influence.



Fig. 2 Unidentified object from Westonzoyland

Roman fastener from Misterton (SOM-BF7D5F)

An enamelled copper-alloy button and loop fastener (Fig. 3); it is of Wild's Class VIa (Wild 1970, 141–42, fig. 2) dating to the 2nd century AD. The fastener has a rectangular head decorated with a four petalled flower in a rectangular border. The flower has a recessed circular centre which, along

with the recessed area around the flower, contains red enamel. On the back of the head is an integrally cast shank. The shank is oval in cross-section and runs vertically down from the head before bending out 90 degrees and widening into an open triangular loop. The fastener measures 29.4mm in length, 17.5mm wide, 14.9mm thick and weighs 13.73g.

While not rare nationally, only four button and loop fasteners have been recorded by the PAS in Somerset and this is the only enamelled example.



Fig. 3 Fastener from Misterton

Roman mount from Wraxall and Failand (GLO-549164)

A Roman copper-alloy mount inlaid with enamel and millefiori glass dating to c. AD 50–300 (Fig. 4). It consists of a circular disc with a recessed circular central cell surrounded by an outer recessed ring. Inside the circular cell is a central millefiori square surrounded by red and blue enamel. The outer ring contains eight millefiori squares separated by small squares of blue or red enamel. On the reverse is a long rectangular scar running almost across the diameter of the object, probably indicating the position of a missing fitting. The mount is 20mm in diameter, 4mm thick and weighs 5.49g.

This highly decorative mount is likely to have functioned as a furniture or horse harness fitting. A similar disc with millefiori decoration was found in Essex in a late 2nd to early 3rd century context (Draper 1985, 27 fig. 9, SF15) and another in the British Museum collection (1891,0327.9), from Chepstow, Monmouthshire, is dated to the 2nd to



Fig. 4 Mount from Wraxall and Failand

3rd century. This example is unusually far south and west as previous examples recorded by PAS come from Durham (1), Lincolnshire (2) Norfolk (1), Northumberland (1), Oxfordshire (1) and Yorkshire (3).

Roman *nummus* from Martock (SOM-71D4C7)

A Roman copper-alloy *nummus* of Constantine I dating to the year AD 320, Reece period 16 (Fig. 5), RIC Vol. VII, p. 317, no. 194. RIC incorrectly states that Roma is seated left. The reverse carries the legend ROMAE AETERNAE, the personification of eternal Rome seated right, holding a shield inscribed "X/V". Minted in the fourteenth year of Constantine's reign, the numerals were probably intended to celebrate his impending fifteenth anniversary (many emperors were guilty of prematurely celebrating significant anniversaries). The coin is 20.6mm in diameter and weighs 3.37g. Coins of this type are rare finds in Britain, however, of particular interest on this example is the mint mark; comprising the letters R – CT flanking the word AMOR, written in Ancient Greek. The letter R signifies the mint of Rome, CT indicates the officina, or workshop. The word AMOR is a palindrome of Roma. By the time of Constantine the deified personification of Rome and that of Venus, goddess of love and mythical ancestor of the Roman people, had been associated for several centuries. The double temple of Venus and Rome was one of the largest in the city. The combination of

palindrome and imagery references both goddesses and paints Constantine as the legitimate heir of this quasi-mythical tradition.



Fig. 5 Nummus from Martock

Medieval seal matrix from Langford Budville (SOM-721AF8)

A lead-alloy pointed oval seal matrix (Fig. 6). The matrix is fragile and cracked with damage to the edges and pitting on the back. On the front there is a central incuse design of an fleur de lis surrounded by a plain line border then the inscription reading SIGILL . GVNIL RELICTE . T . d'PIL within an outer plain line border, the reverse is plain and flat. This appears to be a personal inscription and can be expanded to *Sigillum Gunhilda relicte T[...] de Pil*, Seal of Gunhilda widow of T[...] of Pil. The matrix is now 48.6mm long, 31.5mm wide, 5.1mm thick. It weighs 28.97g.

The size and simple style of the matrix might suggest a 13th, probably mid-13th century date (Harvey and McGuiness 1996, 80). Intriguingly, however one or two Gunhilds are known at the nearby Cothay in the early 14th century. Gunhild, sister of William of Cothay and wife of Thomas owned land there in AD 1309 (Somerset Heritage Centre DD/S/CK/2). Somerset Heritage Centre DD/S/CK/10 dating to 1324 is a quit claim by the same William of Cothay over land between his hall and the neighbouring hall of John de Wyslaugh and his wife Gunhild. This second Gunhild may be the daughter of the first or indeed the same person who has remarried. The seals attached to these documents are of a smaller module than this matrix.

While later than the style of matrix might suggest, the Gunhild mentioned in the first document is a strong candidate for the owner of this seal as she had a relatively unusual name, was married to a Thomas and owned land locally and therefore would have

need of a seal matrix. Piley Lane runs south east out of Cothay to a Piley copse to the east, a possibility for the place name mentioned on the matrix.



Fig. 6 Seal matrix from Langford Budville

Two medieval jettons from Cothelstone (SOM-1BC3F4 & SOM-1BA109)

These copper-alloy jettons made in Tournai between AD 1461–1497, are contemporaneous with the reigns of Louis XI and Charles VIII of France (Fig. 7). The jettons have the same design, a large IHS on one face with the legend AVE MARI STELLA DEI MATER (Hail Star of the Sea, Mother of God) taken from the popular liturgical hymn. On the reverse the same legend is repeated around a central design of a cross fleuretty with flowers in the angles. Mitchiner (1988, 212) publishes for parallels of this design, in particular no. 608.

While these two jettons are of a widespread design and standard diameter, both 26.2mm, they are unusually thick and therefore heavy, 7.66g and



Fig. 7 Jetton from Cothelstone

8.26g. Over twice as heavy as those in Mitchiner. This suggests they may be ‘piedfort’ examples: larger pieces used as place markers for the end of the row when casting accounts using jettons. Jettons were used to do calculations in the same way as an abacus, with a row representing units, tens, etc. Often this was done on a chequered cloth (hence exchequer) or board, but place markers could also be used to indicate each row. The finding of two together suggests they were part of a set.

Post-medieval decorated stone from Churchill (SOM-49A4F1)

A late medieval or post-medieval stone fragment, probably from a reused gravestone or building marker dating to c. AD 1450–1700 (Fig. 8). Broadly triangular with one curved edge, it is D-shaped in cross-section. The back and sides show evidence of tool marks and reworking suggesting it was deliberately cut down. The front has traces of an inscription of which only an I survives. Next to the inscription is a relief carved image of the sun above a rectangle divided into two panels by a horizontal groove. The upper panel has a series of four curved vertical grooves followed by five drilled circles. The lower panel has five or six curved vertical grooves which run to the reworked edge of the object. The object is made from a hard, smooth fine-grained stone with occasional white quartzite inclusions. It measures 97.4mm in length, 97.7mm maximum width, 41.6mm maximum thickness, and weighs 441g.

The design may represent the sails of a ship. The



Fig. 8 Stone from Churchill

reuse of gravestones in later buildings is a well-attested practice, in Britain most commonly during the renovation or rebuilding of a church. However the design on this enigmatic piece is unusual and it may be from a keystone or datestone rather than a gravestone.

Post-medieval dog collar from Ashcott (SOM-DAD21E)

A copper-alloy dog collar (Fig. 9) inscribed with the legend: *Samuell Birch (shield) att Shilton neare Burford in Oxfordshir[e] 1676*. The shield bears the arms of Samuel Birch: a chevron between three fleur-de-lis arranged two and one with a crescent for difference. Flanking the inscription along the upper and lower edges of the strip is a double line of punched annulets arranged in regular waves with stamped double concentric rings between. The collar is a flat strip 41.1mm wide by 1.9mm thick and still bent into a circle, 164mm across with overlapping ends; it weighs 335g. Iron ring hasps would have linked the holes in one end with the vertical slots on the other end and would also have attached to a swivel for the leash (Rogers and Robinson 2003 :214); rusted remains are visible in some holes.

Samuel Birch II (1620/21–1680), ejected minister and schoolmaster, was the second son of Samuel Birch of Ardwick Manor, Manchester. He was a Major in the Parliamentary army before returning to Oxford. During this period it is known he fought under his brother Colonel John Birch, whose regiment in the New Model Army helped capture Bridgwater in July 1645 amongst other successes. Samuel moved to Shilton, Berkshire, in 1664 and he opened a ‘conventicling’ school for the sons of dissenters which was very popular (Dils 2008).

The size of the collar suggests that it was worn by a large-necked hunting dog. Samuel Birch clearly had connections across the country from his ministry, studies and teaching, and perhaps less happy ones from his military service, and was presumably visiting locally with his dog when it was lost between 1676 and his death in 1680.

Endnotes

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



Fig. 9 Dog collar from Ashcott

Acknowledgements

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