FINDS REPORTED TO THE PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME IN 2017

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INTRODUCTION

In 2017 a total of 3,438 finds from Somerset[1] were recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) in 1,652 records.

- The recorded finds were of all periods from the Palaeolithic to the present day, with the following breakdown, based on number of records rather than objects[2]: Palaeolithic: <1%, Mesolithic: 1%, Neolithic: 3%, Bronze Age: 3%, Iron Age: 1%, Roman: 36%, Early-Medieval: 1%, Medieval: 22%, Post-Medieval: 31%, and Modern: <1%. 2% were of unknown period[3].
- They were made from a range of materials including metal: 84% (of which copper alloys 66%), pottery: 9%, worked stone: 7% and glass: <1%.
- Most finds were discovered whilst metal detecting (90%), including 3% 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 PAS this year was a Roman lead tank from Trudoxhill (SOM-D21663), discussed elsewhere in this volume. Many other finds examined by the Somerset Finds Liaison Officers[4] 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

Neolithic arrowhead from Westbury-sub-Mendip (SOM-305999)

One of three Late Neolithic flint oblique arrowheads, probably dating to c. 3300-2400 BC found with other flintwork. This example (Fig. 1) was worked from a tertiary flake of opaque beige flint with cloudy white patination. The arrowhead is sub-triangular, tapering to an exaggerated point at the top and with one convex edge which curves down beyond the base of the arrowhead to form a well-defined barb. The base and back of the arrowhead feature short, semi-abrupt, scalar retouch on both faces; the retouch to the convex edge is similar in character but far finer, and is only apparent on the dorsal face. The arrowhead is 30.2mm long, 22.4mm wide, 4.3mm thick and weighs 2.06g.

Oblique arrowheads are rarer finds that the earlier leaf-shaped or later barb-and-tanged types. This group was found around 50 years ago by a finder who is now elderly. Recording such 'historic' finds is particularly important, while the findspot is still known first-hand.

Fig. 1 Arowhead from Westbury-sub-Mendip

Early Roman *as* from Spaxton (SOM-A21AFC)

A very worn copper-alloy Roman Republican *as* (Fig. 2) of uncertain moneyer dating to the first half of the 2nd century BC (Reece period 1). Obverse depicting a laureate janiform head; reverse depicting a prow right, possibly with I above and

[R]OM[A] below; minted at Rome. See RRC 194/1 (Crawford 1975) for similar type. The coin is 30mm in diameter and weighs 16.5g.

Pre-conquest Roman silver coins are not uncommon in Britain, in particular the Marc Antony legionary *denarii*, many of which were found in the Shapwick hoard (Minnitt 2001 15-16). Those coins were still in circulation post-conquest and some may have come in pre-conquest through trade, valued for their silver content. Pre-conquest copper-alloy coins are much rarer, with fewer than 20 recorded nationally by the PAS. They are unlikely to have had a role in trade pre-conquest, and even post-conquest copper-alloy coins probably formed only a small part in trade outside the main settlements, or army related purchases, until the 2nd or 3rd centuries. It is possible this coin and a silver Armorican stater of the Coriosolitae (HESH-B49698; Reavill 2017), dated to around 56 BC and found in the same parish (Fig. 3), both relate to the same, pre-conquest activity or contact.

Fig. 2 Early Roman as *from Spaxton*

Fig. 3 Stater *from Spaxton*

Roman brooch from Lovington (DEV-7E23F1)

An incomplete Roman copper-alloy horse-and-rider brooch (Fig. 4). The head, rear, and most of the front leg of the horse are missing. The two figures are depicted facing right. The arm of the rider is angled down at his side, and he appears to be holding a stick or sword in his hand. Recessed cells fill the bodies of both figures but none of the original enamel remains. The brooch now measures 24.1mm high, 22.6mm wide, 1.4mm thick and weighs 3.67g.

Bayley and Butcher (2004, 175-176) date horse-and-rider brooches from the late 3rd century into the early 5th, and suggest that this brooch type has a strong religious connection due to large quantities discovered at temple sites, such as Lamyatt Beacon (Leech 1986, 318, nos. 6-10). It has also been suggested that these brooches may depict a Romano-Celtic rider god, perhaps a combination of Mars and a native deity, and may have been purchased from shrines as the Roman equivalent of medieval pilgrim badges (Johns 1996, 173-174). While nationally not uncommon they are rarer in the West and this is the first from Somerset recorded by the PAS.

Fig. 4 Roman brooch from Lovington

Roman finger ring from West Crewkerne (SOM-AC7F9A)

A late Roman copper-alloy finger ring, of local type (Fig. 5). The ring has a flat, oval bezel, decorated by a pattern of incised lines within an oval border. The bezel is flanked by moulding on each shoulder; on one side there is a break between the shoulder and bezel. The hoop is plain and semi-circular in cross section. The ring is 19.3mm in diameter, 2.8mm wide, 1.4mm thick and weighs 1.76g.

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A number of extremely similar examples have been found in the region (e.g. in Dorchester, Worth Maltravers, and two near Corfe Castle in Dorset; in Bawdrip, Bishops Hull and Ston Easton in Somerset, and in Swindon, Wiltshire). Ralph Jackson (pers. comm.) has previously suggested 'it is just possible that the design is a rather rudimentarily-incised version of the early Christian chi-rho motif – the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek (X and P) superimposed... with a symmetrical arrangement of four 'flecks' in the field.' It is notable that on this example (along with that from Bawdrip) that the incised lines are aligned differently, and do not form an X, suggesting either that this pattern is becoming more abstract, or the patterns do not form the chi-rho. The identification of this style of ring as a very local type is, however, maintained.

Fig. 5 Roman finger ring from West Crewkerne

Early-medieval strap-end from Staple Fitzpaine (DEV-60981B, Treasure case 2017 T874)

This very unusual silver terminal, probably from a strap-end, is moulded in the three-dimensional form of an animal's, perhaps a boar's, head (Fig. 6). The head has an elongated snout with slightly downturned lower lip and long lappets curling down the sides. On the prominent brow ridge are two circular eyes and above this are projecting semi-circular ears. One projection remains above the head creating a complete front for a short distance ending in an incomplete rivet hole. A groove suggests there was a vertical slot running down the piece between a front and possibly a back plate. This fragment is 23.3mm long, 10.8mm wide, 7.6mm thick and weighs 4.59g. The Museum of Somerset hopes to acquire this Treasure case.

The object's decoration is clearly inspired by the Ringerike art style and the form is similar to some strap-ends of Thomas's Class B, Type 6, such as the PAS recorded SUSS-51A3F5 (Burnett 2008) and NCL-931305 (Echtenacher 2007). A very similar object, from Brigstock, Northamptonshire was reported through the Treasure process and is now in the British Museum (reg. no. 2016,8008.1) (Watters 2013).

It is also notable that this piece was found relatively near DEV-9AB065 (Partridge 2017a) a strap-end with Carolingian-style decoration (Fig. 7), an art style which is extremely rare in the region, and DEV-C89B2C (Partridge 2017b) a stirrup-strap mount of unusual form.

Fig. 6 Early-medieval strap-end from Staple Fitzpaine

Fig. 7 Strap-end from Bickenhall

Medieval book fitting from Old Cleeve (SOM-EA31E5)

A medieval copper-alloy stud from a book (Fig. 8). The stud is highly domed and octagonal, formed of eight equally spaced points. The top is flattened and appears worn, especially compared to the sides which still have file marks from finishing. The back is hollow although the sides are relatively thick and robust. A single integral attachment spike projects from the centre of the back. The entire piece is 34.7mm by 32.4mm and 25.2mm thick and weighs 34.46g.

The stud was found near Cleeve Abbey and almost certainly associated with it. A very similar stud, in broad form, although with a different outline, is currently on display at Cleeve Abbey. Howsam (2016, 98) catalogues similar studs as her type B.1.6, dated to the 13th to 14th centuries; she identifies several of seemingly identical form still in situ on books originally from Holme Cultram, Cumbria and Rievaulx, North Yorkshire, both Cistercian abbeys and lists another example from St Mary Graces, London, also Cistercian. Howsam suggests these are a distinctly English group

(ibid) and the connections with the Cistercians also appears strong, the binding may have been commissioned from or distributed through connections between Cistercian abbeys.

Medieval pilgrim badge from Othery (SOM-315A8C)

A gilded copper-alloy badge depicting St George and the dragon of late 15th-century date (Fig. 9). This badge depicts St George holding a sword (the tip lost to an old break) above his head and with his other hand using a shield to force open the dragon's mouth. The shield is elaborately shaped and decorated with a St George's cross. The dragon is on its back underneath St George's feet. St George appears to be dressed in contemporary 15th-century armour. The piece is 45.1mm long, 23.9mm wide, 7.8mm including the lug on the back and weighs 7.32g.

Badges depicting St George were particularly popular during the 15th and the early 16th centuries reflecting 'the growing importance of St George as a symbol of English nationalism and military prowess' (Spencer 1998, 186). Most feature him using a spear but WMID-FB76D, also recorded by the PAS, from Staffordshire, appears to be of the same design as this (Johnson 2004). The form of ornate shield on this example is sometimes called a 'renaissance' shield and suggests a date of c. AD 1475–1540. Edwin Wood (pers. comm.) has commented in detail on the armour which, in combination with the hairstyle suggests a date no later than 1500 giving a very tight date range of AD 1475–1500 for the piece.

Fig. 8 Medieval book fitting from Old Cleeve

Fig. 9 Medieval pilgrim badge from Othery

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Post-medieval wine glass stem from Trudoxhill (SOM-44A53A)

Part of a post-medieval goblet dating to c. AD 1550–1650 (Fig. 10). The almost colourless mould-blown stem has broken at the two narrowest points. The remaining section is broadly conical, widening out quickly from the circular sectioned solid connecting rod at the top, to distinct shoulders from which point it narrows in a convex curve to the lower constriction where it has broken across the open part. The moulded design is of two opposed lion faces with a side boss of five pellets and linking festoon of pellets below; there is gadrooning above and below. The stem measures 44.07m in length, 30.49mm at its widest point and weighs 13.36g.

A similar example can be found in Willmott (2002, 63, no. 64) and dated to c. AD 1550–1650. It appears most similar to Willmott (2000) Class B but may not be from that exact mould. The lion mask is the most common variety of mound-blown stem in England, made from a mixed-alkali or soda glass, and is also known throughout Europe.

Fig. 10 Post-medieval wine glass stem from Trudoxhill

Post-medieval hawking vervel from East Chinnock (SOM-E93B19, Treasure case 2017 T533)

A complete post-medieval silver hawking vervel (Fig. 11). The vervel is a ring which is flat in cross section. Both faces are inscribed in seriffed capitals: *IOHN* // *STRANGWAYES. A small line of blacker material appears to be a repair. The vervel has an external diameter of 12.0mm,

the central aperture is 5.4mm in diameter and it is 1.3mm thick; it weighs 0.87g.

Such vervels are typically dated to the late 16th and 17th centuries (Lewis and Richardson 2017, 194) and were attached to the legs of birds of prey in order to identify their owners. One family of Strangeways were based at Melbury House in Melbury Sampford, Dorset, just under 10 miles away to the south east and the vervel can reasonably be attributed to them. However, there were several John Strangwayes in the family in this period so it cannot be confidently attributed to a specific individual. The most prominent lived between 1585 and 1666 and served as an MP for both the Dorset and Weymouth constituencies. The Museum of Somerset hopes to acquire this Treasure case.

Fig. 11 Post-medieval hawking vervel from East Chinnock

Modern group of coins from Weston-super-Mare (PUBLIC-8ECB27)

Two melted and solidified fused lumps of metal alloys (Fig. 12) and around 300 individual coins were found to the right of the current pavilion on Weston-super-Mare beach amongst shingle. The coins were modern, mainly lower denominations and of pre-2008 types, many fire damaged. The fused lumps also consisted of melted coins, more or less identifiable, including fifty, twenty, ten and five pence pieces, all of types current in 2008. The first group measures c.120mm in length and c.70mm in width and it also contained a chunk of material, probably concrete. The second group measures c.66mm in length and c.40mm in width.

Both pieces and the stray coins appear to be remains from the fire which destroyed the pavilion

at Weston's Grand Pier in 2008. Up to £100,000 in cash was thought to have been lost in the blaze. Firefighters at the time reported that the fire left most coins melted or fused together, many having come from the pier's 370 slot machines (McDonald 2008).

Fig. 12 Modern group of coins from Weston-super-Mare

Notes
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.
4   Since April 2017 Somerset and Devon PAS have been combined and the role of FLO for both counties shared between Wil Partridge and myself.

Acknowledgements

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