

FINDS REPORTED TO THE PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME IN 2010-2011

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INTRODUCTION

In 2010 and 2011 a total of 4,367 finds from Somerset¹ were recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) in 2,332 records. This total (and the report below) excludes the major find of these years, the Frome Hoard of Roman radiate coins and the smaller hoard of siliquae found nearby, reported previously in *SANH* 154. In 2010 the Celtic Coin Index was incorporated into the PAS database. The index has been compiling records of Iron Age coins, including museum collections and new finds, since the 1960s. These data have also been excluded to allow comparison between years.

- The recorded finds were of all periods from the Palaeolithic to c.AD 1900, with the following breakdown (statistics based on number of records rather than objects²): Palaeolithic: <1%, Mesolithic: 4%, Neolithic: 6%, Bronze Age: 2%, Iron Age: 1%, Roman: 34%, Early-Medieval: 1%, Medieval: 19%, Post Medieval: 30% and Modern: 2%. 1% were of unknown period³.
- They were made from a range of materials: metal 83% (of which copper alloys 63%), pottery 6% and worked stone 12%.
- Most finds were discovered whilst metal detecting (86%), some 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 Officer and colleagues were not recorded – generally finds that post-date AD 1700. Those described below are a selection that are felt to be particularly 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

Mesolithic microlith from Bishops Lydeard (SOM-8D9385)

Pale brown Greensand chert microlith, formed from part of a blade, dating to c.8,300 to 3,500 BC (Fig. 1)⁴. The edges have short, scalar abrupt retouch down their entire lengths; apart from the proximal end of one edge which appears unretouched. The proximal end of the blade with the bulb of percussion has been removed. It is 21.5mm long, 7.3mm wide and 2.4mm thick and weighs 0.45g.

It is rare to find a microlith made of chert as the fine working required is difficult on this granular material. Although high quality flint is not found locally all other examples from this site were of such flint. The small amount of material required perhaps meant it could be consistently utilised even though it had to be sourced from some distance.

This microlith is part of a large collection of field walked material collected over many years.

The collection includes evidence of Mesolithic activity, some possibly Early -Middle Neolithic material including leaf shaped arrowheads and a fragment of polished axehead and some Early Bronze Age material. The producers utilised a wide range of materials, some probably sourced locally, some from at least as far as South and East Somerset.



Fig. 1 Microlith from Bishops Lydeard

Fragment of a Middle Bronze Age torc from near Sherborne (SOM-5E0AB6)

Curved fragment of a copper-alloy twisted ribbon torc dating to c. 1400-1100 BC (Fig. 2)⁵. The fragment has six twists with old, patinated, breaks at each end. The twists are slightly tighter at the ends and the curve is uneven suggesting it has



Fig. 2 Torc fragment from near Sherborne

been bent out of shape. The 'ribbon' is a flattened pointed oval in section. The fragment is 64.8mm long and weighs 8.28g, the ribbon varies from 8.0 to 7.3mm wide.

There are two Middle Bronze Age ribbon torcs known in bronze from Somerset: from the hoards at Edington Burtle and Wedmore (Eogan 1983, 124-125). In general ribbon torcs are more commonly found in Ireland and Scotland than England but there appears to be a concentration in the South West (Eogan *ibid.*).

Roman brooches from Charlton Mackrell and near Cheddar (SOM-EB0A66 and SOM-81F506)

Roman brooches are common finds recorded through the PAS with over 17,500 recorded to date. There is a distinct regionality to the types, probably reflecting production as well as consumption choices. Two examples from Somerset in 2010-11 have an unusual construction (Figs. 3 and 4). Rather than cast they are formed of copper-alloy sheet rolled into a tube to create the bow with a lead solder core and separate sheet catchplate. Only the lower part of the bows of both survive so the types are unclear, but they appear to be Colchester or Colchester derivative.

This construction method is very rare, but according to S. Worrell, PAS National Finds Advisor for Prehistoric, Iron Age and Roman Artefacts (pers. comm.) 'does seem to be a technique characteristic of the South West immediately before and after the Roman



Fig. 3 Brooch fragment from Charlton Mackrell



Fig. 4 Brooch fragment from near Cheddar

conquest'. Emphasising this southern distribution the only other examples recorded by PAS, WILT-207A94 and SUR-34EAE7, are from Wiltshire and Hampshire respectively.

SOM-EB0A66 (Fig. 3) is 46.9mm long, 8.2mm wide by 6.2mm thick at the top and weighs 8.51g. It has a small circular headstud at the top of the bow, a feature of local developed T-shaped brooches. SOM-81F506 (Fig. 4) is 35.2mm long, 7.4mm wide by 4.1mm thick at the top and weighs 1.63g.

Roman *as* of Augustus from Crewkerne (SOM-6D2A24)

Roman coins were one of the most common finds recorded in 2010-11 with 557 coins plus the above mentioned hoards. In general 3rd century radiates and 4th century *nummi* predominate (23% and 58% respectively).

This coin (Fig. 5) is a copper-alloy *as* of Augustus, minted by the moneyer C. Plotius Rufus in Rome, in 23 BC, RIC I (rev.ed.), no. 389. It is 25.7mm in diameter, 2.2mm thick and 7.93g in weight. While *asses* of Augustus would still have been in circulation at the conquest they are rare imports into Britain, with only eight recorded by PAS. In the immediate post-conquest period there appears to be a shortage of small change, like this *as*, in Britain; probably as the Iron Age tribal mints were closed down and the new government was importing mostly higher value coinage to pay the troops and for supplies.



Fig. 5 *As* from Crewkerne

Early Medieval *semissis* of Justin II from Kelston (GLO-A8A3F5)

Numerous Byzantine coins have been recorded through the PAS. Without a stratified context there is always the risk some are later imports, but they are found on contemporary sites so cannot be dismissed out of hand (Moorhead 2009). This gold *semissis* (Fig. 6) of Justin II (AD 565-78), Hahn no.24a, was minted in Sicily⁶ and is the only one of the period to be found in Britain, although copper-alloy coins of the same ruler are known. It is 18mm in diameter, 0.9mm thick and weighs 2.2g. S. Moorhead, PAS National Finds Advisor for Iron Age and Roman coins, has suggested it arrived as a result of trade via the Straits of Gibraltar or the River Garonne.



Fig. 6 *Semissis* from Kelston

Late Early Medieval strap end from Cossington (SOM-45C877)

This tongue shaped strap end (Fig. 7) is a variant of Thomas Class E, Type 1 (Thomas 2004, 1-3, fig. 4). The straight attachment end was probably originally split but only the back part remains. The upper part is moulded into a convex bear's head with semi-circular ears, slight brow ridges



Fig. 7 Strap end from Cossington

and short blunt muzzle. Inlaid niello ring and dot form the eyes. From the bear's mouth project flatter, branching tendrils forming the rounded terminal. The back is flat apart from a concave section behind the head. The strap end is 31.8mm long, 20.1mm wide and 7.7mm thick, it weighs 9.52g.

Class E groups together tongue shaped strap

ends with an average ratio of width to length of 1:2. Type 1 includes those with Winchester style decoration, often in openwork like the lower part of this example. They are dated to c. AD 950-1050 (Thomas *ibid.*, 1). The tendril decoration is similar to others of this type, however the raised head is not paralleled in the usual sources.

Medieval steelyard weight from Shepton Montague (SOM-FDCC33)

Copper-alloy globular steelyard weight with lead interior and heraldic decoration (Fig. 8). At the top is a suspension loop with grooved decoration. The decoration continues on the upper part of the sides. Arranged at regular intervals around the sides are three shield-shaped mouldings containing heraldic devices- a lion rampant, a lion rampant sinister, and an imperial double headed eagle. The weight is 77mm tall, 68mm in diameter and weighs 907g

As the devices are cast in relief it falls into Drury Class I (Ward Perkins 1940, 172). The arms are those of Richard Earl of Cornwall, or of his son Edmund (*ibid.*), who had a monopoly over the production of this official type of weight during the later 13th century. These weights remained



Fig. 8 Weight from Shepton Montague

in use into the 14th century (Cherry 1991, 47). A very similar weight was found in London (Ward Perkins 1940, 147, pl. XXXVIII, no.2), but no two are ever identical due to the lost wax casting method used in their production.

Medieval double *briquet* of Mary of Burgundy from Bishop’s Hull (SOM-C96300)

Silver hammered double *briquet* of Mary of Burgundy (1477-1482), probably dating from AD 1481, Levinson II.59, Frey 225C (Fig. 9). The coin is 26.0mm in diameter, 0.8mm thick and weighs 2.4g. There is a notch at one side, which appears to be later damage.

This coin is doubly rare as one of only two coins of Mary recorded by the PAS and one of only three *briquettes*. Coins of her father (Charles the Bold) and son (Philip the Fair) are relatively common English finds as the double *patard* of Burgundy was recognised as legal tender equivalent to the groat from 1469 and can constitute up to 20% of hoards in the period up to 1500 (Allen 2002, 34). The rarity of coins of Mary probably relates to her short reign and the quantity of coin she issued.



Fig. 9 Double briquet from Bishop’s Hull

Post Medieval finger ring from Backwell (GLO-864248, Treasure case 2011 T257)

Mid-16th to 17th century gold gimmel ring made from two interlocking bands (Fig. 10). On the inside edge of each band is an inscription reading * WITH . HART . AND . HAND / I . MADE . THIS . BAND *. On the top edge of each ring was soldered a hand with a cuff; one of the hands is missing but the cuff remains. There is a small incised heart in the centre of the remaining hand. This heart and the inscription would have been hidden when the bands were fitted together into

a single ring with the hands clasped. The ring is 21mm in diameter and weighs 3.88g.

Lace cuffs, as seen on this example, were fashionable between the mid-16th century and late 17th century. The lettering style and spelling are found on posy rings of this period, for instance 2003 T403 (DCMS 2006, 129, 239) and 2004 T111 (DCMS 2007, 136, 294). Gimmel rings were fashionable from the Renaissance but declined in popularity in the 17th century (Scarbrick and Henig 2003, 28, 64). As it is more than 300 years old and contains more than 10% precious metal this ring was declared Treasure and acquired by Weston-super-Mare Museum.



Fig. 10 Finger ring from Backwell

Post Medieval trader’s token farthing from Chedzoy (SOM-2DC917)

Copper-alloy token farthing of ‘A merchant of the staple of England’ dating from AD 1652 to 1670 (Fig. 11). This is a known type but the name and location of the issuer is unknown, Williamson (1891, 1427), Without Names of Towns, Issuers or Initials, no.92. It is 20.4mm in diameter, 1.7mm thick and weighs 3.88g.

17th century token farthings have been well catalogued, however much research is based on unprovenanced examples or pieces that have been curated. Found examples recorded through the PAS have the potential for research into the distance tokens travelled and circulation patterns, and through that an insight into 17th century market patterns. Because the issuer is uncertain

the findspot is particularly significant for this example as it may help the area of issue to be narrowed down.



Fig. 11 Token farthing from Chedzoy

Post Medieval toy cannon from Pitminster (SOM-D20D91)

Cast copper-alloy toy cannon of probable 18th-century date, with part of the gun carriage attached (Fig. 12)⁷. The cannon barrel is complete but there is a hole in the side wall where it is thinner because the muzzle was cast off-centre. The incomplete field carriage is made of several pieces of thick copper-alloy sheet. It has two curving cheeks or brackets, one incomplete; they were probably linked at the tail and by the closed end of the cannon by iron bars, now rusted. There is also a cross bar on which the wheels are



Fig. 12 Toy cannon from Pitminster

threaded. In total it is 78.4mm long, 40.9mm wide and 15.1mm tall; it weighs 29.42g.

Such toy cannons are relatively common finds but gun carriages are very rare, perhaps as they were so simply made they easily become detached. These toys were popular by the end of the 16th century but the majority, like our example, show features that were developed on real cannon in the 17th or 18th centuries (Forsyth with Egan 2005, 80-81). Examples with explosive damage show they could be fired. Due to the mis-casting this example would be unsafe to use.

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. Neolithic objects accounted for 31% of all objects for example but a lot of this is debitage from sites that appeared primarily Neolithic in character.
- ³ Mostly material such as lead weights or metal working debris that are inherently hard to date out of context.
- ⁴ Included in the PAS Annual Report, Lewis 2012, 15.
- ⁵ Included in the PAS Annual Report, Lewis 2012, 16.
- ⁶ Included in the PAS Annual Report, Lewis 2011, 19 and in Adams 2012.
- ⁷ Included in the ITV television series Britain's Secret Treasures in 2012.

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