# The Portable Antiquities Scheme in Oxfordshire, 2014

September 2014 saw the one millionth find recorded for the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS); the object was a rather unassuming fourth-century nummus from a hoard of *c*.22,000 coins found in Devon. This milestone represents nearly seventeen years of online recording, undertaken by a network of thirty-nine Finds Liaison Officers (FLOs) covering every county in England and Wales. Although there is increasing pressure on FLOs in terms of workload and funding, a new HLF volunteer project, *PASt Explorers*, aims to increase the recording capacity of the PAS through the help of regional volunteers. Other centrally administered projects that involve the PAS include *MicroPasts*, a crowdsourcing and crowdfunding initiative with University College London, and the *Lost Change: Mapping Coins* project. Further information on these projects can be found at www.finds.org.uk.

In Oxfordshire, 2,152 objects were reported and 1,633 object records were created in 2014. As usual, finds of the Roman period were the most numerous: 1,137 of the finds were Roman (of which 72 per cent were coins). The post-medieval and medieval period finds made up 18 per cent and 15 per cent of the total respectively. Most finds came from the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire. There were no large rallies in 2014, but several smaller events, including 'holiday digs' for American tourists, for which the Vale is an area of choice. Many of the objects found on these digs are destined for the US, so every object has to be recorded in preparation for an export licence. Metal-detector users are often biased in what they choose to record, but for export licences everything that pre-dates 1950 must be declared. The number of reported finds of treasure increased to twenty-nine cases in 2014, a number only paralleled in 2010. This increase may be attributed to better recognition and understanding of the legal requirements to report treasure, which is actively promoted by the PAS with metal-detector users.

Some of the more notable finds of 2014 are presented below. Further information on these and other finds can be found by visiting www.finds.org.uk/database. For any queries please contact Anni Byard (anni.byard@oxfordshire.gov.uk).
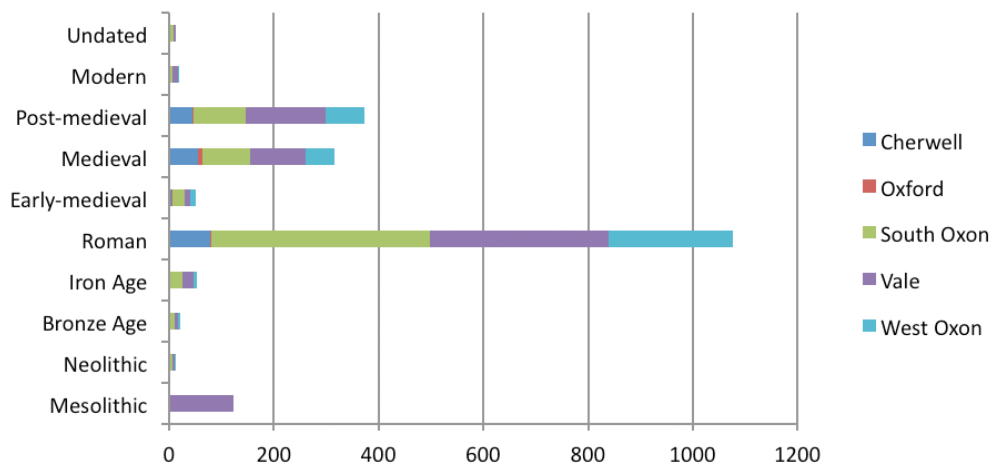
*Bronze-Age Knife-Dagger from near Bicester (*BERK-2C1FC7*)*

An uncommon early Bronze-Age (2350–1601 BC) knife-dagger was discovered near two ploughed-out barrows to the south of Bicester by a metal-detector user. The knife-dagger is broadly triangular in plan and has some damage to the butt end where the circular rivet holes are broken. The midrib is worn but is widest at the butt, gradually narrowing to the tip, which is rounded. The midrib is not symmetrical; it does not line-up when the knife-dagger is viewed in section, with one rib being slightly above the other. The dagger has a surviving length of 62.15 mm, maximum width of 43.98 mm and weighs 23.9 g. These knife-daggers are not common objects, although a few other examples have been recorded on the PAS database.[1] All early Bronze Age knife-daggers recorded by Gerloff were found associated with cremation burials beneath barrows within the Wessex Culture area;[2] the findspot of this example suggests a similar context.

*Iron-Age Bronze Coin from Drayton CP (*BERK-838D00*)*

This copper alloy coin, a Southern Gaulish 'Massalia Bull MA'-type unit dating to the later middle Iron Age,[3] is a rare find for Britain. It is an example of a kind of coin known as a 'potin', which was struck on a cast flan. This coin does not appear to be a British 'Thurrock' or 'Kentish Primary' potin, but a Gaulish import issued in the southern port town of Marseilles, which imitated cast bronze coins of the Greek colony of Massalia at Marseilles, the issue later copied by the Kentish Cantiaci rulers. Dating from *c.*250-150 BC, this coin may belong to the earliest phase of copying the bronze coinage of Marseille in the Paris basin or, more likely, be a genuine late issue of Marseille.[4] The coin depicts the head of Apollo on the obverse and a bull butting to the right on the reverse, with the letters 'MA' above. Only six of these coins have been recorded by the PAS, and interestingly this is the first of two such coins from Oxfordshire, the second having been found recently in West Hendred,[5] only 6 km from the Drayton find.

*Roman Figurine from Beckley (*BERK-F1499B*)*[6]

This nearly complete cast copper alloy Roman figurine of Mercury is an exciting find. Coming from near the site of the Roman villa at Beckley (largely destroyed in 1862), the figurine depicts Mercury holding a purse in the palm of his right hand and wearing a silver torc around his neck. The figure is naked apart from a chlamys (short cloak) draped over his left shoulder. In his left hand he probably held a caduceus, a winged staff held by messengers and heralds. The figurine is very good condition with many of the facial and body features clear; however the left arm is missing above the elbow and the wings protruding from the head

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[1]   NMGW-567545 (Wilts.), CPAT-3A15F5 (Shrops.), SF9570 (Suff.) and NMS-503645 (Norf.).
[2]   S. Gerloff, *The Early Bronze Age Daggers in Great Britain, and a Reconsideration of the Wessex Culture* (1975), p. 170.
[3]   E. Cottam et al., *Ancient British Coinage* (2010), no. 115.
[4]   Personal communication from I. Leins, curator for Iron Age Coins at the British Museum; C. Brenot and S. Scheers, *Catalogue des Monnaies Massalietes et Monnaies Celtiques du Musee des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, Leuven* (1996), p. 35, series 7. Thanks also to Vincent Drost, Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum, for his comments on this coin.
[5]   PAS, SUR-1535B3.
[6]   With contributions by Martin Henig.

are also missing. The silver torc is a simple piece of round-sectioned silver wire, with flattened and pointed terminals decorated with incised lines. The torc may represent a serpent, which was one of Mercury's symbols and it may have been based on serpent jewellery or bracelets. Representations of Mercury are known throughout the empire; he was the messenger of Jupiter, and was also the patron of travellers and merchants. From the same site an unusual 'P'-shaped continental brooch in excellent condition was also recovered and recorded (BERK-EFCAF1).

Early Medieval Strap-End from Nuffield CP (SUR-970F39)[7]

An incomplete cast silver strap-end, partially gilded and with niello inlay (Treasure case 2014 T666). The strap-end is of Thomas Class E, Type 1,[8] which are tongue-shaped and decorated with Winchester-style decoration often featuring inhabited foliate designs. The surviving part of the design comprises a pair of sinuous beasts in profile, flanking a central foliate stem with branching tendrils. Typically, the creatures inhabiting the foliage on this type of strap-end are birds, with other animals rather less common. The reverse face of the strap-end is flat, and is incised with

incomplete *agnus dei* motif, surrounded by the remains of an inscription in Old English. The text reads [-] Ä M E C A H, that is, -Ä' mec ah, '-Ä' owns me'. This strap-end is only the second known Anglo-Saxon strap end to contain an inscribed text. The other example is a lead strap-end from Crewkerne (Som.), which contains a similar text: w[v]lfstan m[e]c ah a, 'W[u]lfstan owns me', with an extraneous letter at the end.[9] The strap-end is dated to the tenth or eleventh century on the basis of the Winchester-style ornament;[10] the *agnus dei* figure and the letter-forms used in the inscription are entirely consistent with this date. Further discussion of this object can be found on the PAS database (SUR-970F39). Oxfordshire Museum Service hopes to acquire the object.

Medieval Seal Matrix from Woodstock Area (BERK-457074)

This is a complete medieval cast copper alloy seal matrix. The matrix is circular in plan with an integral suspension rib and loop on the reverse. The front of the matrix has a lion rampant within a circular border of small pellets. Between this and a second, outer border

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[7]   Record text by David Williams, FLO for Surrey and East Berkshire; Elisabeth Okasha, University College Cork; Sue Brunning, curator, Insular Early Medieval Collections, Department of Britain, Europe and Prehistory, The British Museum.

[8]   G. Thomas, 'A Survey of Late Anglo-Saxon and Viking-Age Strap-Ends from Britain', University of London PhD thesis (2000), pp. 101–11.

[9]   G. Thomas et al., 'Re-Evaluating Base-Metal Artefacts: An Inscribed Lead Strap-End from Crewkerne, Somerset', in *Anglo-Saxon England*, 37 (2008), pp. 173–181.

[10]   See L. Webster, *Anglo-Saxon Art: A New History* (2012), pp. 174–5 and figs. 141, 142 and 143.

is the inscription "S'WILL' IFIL IOHNS LEGART ?CA'Sh' RI'.D". The beginning of the inscription translates as 'Seal of William, son of John Legart …', but the end is hard to make out. This type of personal seal was popular during the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, after which more impersonal, off-the-shelf seals became popular. This example is likely to date to the later thirteenth century.

Mirror image of Berk-457074

Medieval Pilgrim's Badge from Milton-Under-Wychwood CP (BH-D9F03F)[11]

This incomplete silver gilt pilgrim's badge, dating to the late-medieval period (*c*.1450–1530, depicts Saint George on horseback (Treasure case 2014 T601). The broken lance indicates that the dragon would have been portrayed below the horse. The badge, which is of openwork design, has well-moulded details on its upper surface, and a flat reverse. The horse is largely complete, the one exception being at the front end, where only the tops of the forelegs survive. The horse wears a trapper, with a hole for the eyes, and the bridle is also visible, the reins extending towards the rider. Saint George is seated with his head and upper body twisted to his right, revealing both his full face and the armour covering his torso. Of the rider's limbs, only the right arm and leg are portrayed. The thigh emerges from beneath the tasset and rests upon the saddle, from the base of which extends a stirrup strap. A greave covers the lower leg, with a poleyn and probable fan plate at the knee. A besagew is located at the shoulder, and folds of material or chain mail cover the forearm. Two strands of the rider's surcoat billow out behind.

The cult of Saint George was closely associated with the Chapel of St George, Windsor, which was built by Edward IV (r.1461–70 and 1471–83) and Henry VII (r.1485–1509). Pilgrimage to the chapel, where relics including the saint's heart and leg were kept, reached a peak in the late fifteenth to mid

sixteenth centuries.[12] It is likely that this badge dates from the same period. Oxfordshire Museum Service hopes to acquire it.

Modern Matchbox Holder from Moulsford CP (SUR-961965)[13]

The PAS occasionally records artefacts that post-date 1700 if they are unusual or have an interesting story to tell. One such object is this three-sided aluminium case, an example of First World War 'trench art', presumably used as a matchbox holder. Probably fashioned from a mess tin, one side of the holder is decorated with a symmetrical foliate design with leaves and quatrefoils. The other side bears a pair of crossed rifles with the Union Flag and the American Stars and Stripes flying from the end of the barrels. Above the crossed rifles is a crown with lines radiating from it. The crown separates the words WORLD WAR while

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[11] Record text by Julian Watters, FLO for Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.
[12] M. Lewis, *Saints and their Badges: Saints' Lives and Medieval Pilgrim Badges* (2014), p. 66.
[13] With contributions by David Williams, FLO for Surrey and East Berkshire.

on the spine is the name YPRES. The Belgium town of Ypres was under almost constant bombardment throughout the First World War, but as the Americans joined the campaign in 1917, the item is likely to date to 1917–18.

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