

# The Portable Antiquities Scheme in Oxfordshire, 2016

In 2016 the PAS recorded 83,667 individual artefacts in 61,965 records from England and Wales. The number of treasure cases continues to increase with 1,121 cases reported (1,078 from England, forty from Wales and three from Northern Ireland; Scotland has a different system). In 2016 4,961 artefacts were recorded from Oxfordshire (contained within 2,339 records), with Roman period objects being the most numerous once again. Two Roman coin hoards from Stoke Lyne increased the number of individual artefacts from Cherwell District by 2,082. The number of objects offered for recording continues to increase year-on-year, although the forty per cent increase in treasure cases seen in 2015 was not repeated, with the number of reported cases returning to twenty-nine, the same number as in 2014.

Several commercial (non-club) rallies occurred in Oxfordshire during 2016, including one involving over 600 people near Milton-under-Wychwood. With the aid of several other FLOs and a number of local volunteers, nearly 400 finds were recorded in two days. These records will be entered into the database in 2017 and therefore do not form part of the totals given above. The PAS in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire has recruited four volunteers to help the FLO deal with the continuing increase in finds offered for recording; it goes without saying that without the help of these individuals many hundreds of finds would take a very considerable length of time to be entered into the database.

Several new 'sites' have been identified across Oxfordshire as a result of the work of the PAS. This includes an area providing a number of unusual finds from the Bronze Age to early medieval period near Kingston Bagpuize (see below), and Roman period sites at Mixbury and Childrey, of which the latter has produced over 2,000 finds over twenty years. The Childrey site is subject to a joint recording and survey project between the Ashmolean Museum and the PAS.

There were many notable finds from the county in 2016, many of which deserve more research and fuller publication in their own right. Although several are highlighted here there are many more that for reasons of space do not feature. Notable finds can be located by entering the find's unique reference number (for example, BERK-2CF06A or GLO-439E61) into the PAS database or by ticking the 'find of note' box on the advanced search page of the database, which will return many more results than the few mentioned here. You can also search the database by county or parish, and/or by object type (for example, 'coin').

The PAS strongly encourages research using its data, with higher level access available to researchers. If you are interested in using our data for research and require higher level access please contact the FLO in the first instance.

## FINDS FROM KINGSTON BAGPUIZE

Over the last two years increased metal detecting in the parish has led to a number of interesting artefacts being recorded, including the following.

### *Middle Bronze-Age Dress Pin (BERK-2CF06A)*

This unusual copper alloy hair or dress pin may be a derivative of the 'Picardy Pin' of middle Bronze-Age (Ornament Horizon) date (c.1400–1250 BC). The pin has a globular head with a flat, lightly indented top while below is a slightly swollen collar decorated with two circumferential lines of incised linear scores. The shank of the pin tapers slowly from a sub-circular section

into the almost rectangular terminal, which is missing the tip. The pin has been bent round and is now penannular; this may have been deliberate. The pin is similar to an example of Cool's Class 24 pins of probable second-century AD date,<sup>1</sup> but the pin also shares similarities with late Bronze-Age (Ewart Park phase) to Iron-Age 'cup-headed pins'. However, examples of these periods tend to display a much deeper cup than is seen on the example recorded here.<sup>2</sup> Where this pin differs from the Picardy Pin is that it is missing the characteristic swollen neck,<sup>3</sup> although the head and the simple decoration do suggest some relation. Overall the characteristics of this pin and its patina strongly suggest a Bronze-Age date.<sup>4</sup>



#### *Iron-Age 'Horn Cap' (BERK-AC74EE)*

This very rare and enigmatic object dates to the later Iron Age and is made of copper alloy. The horn cap has two disc-shaped terminals, one of greater diameter than the other, connected together by a circular sectioned shaft which flares outwards at either end. This example is missing its two end caps, which on four other examples is elaborately decorated.<sup>5</sup> There is a circular void through the centre of the horn cap which is very narrow in the base section but appears to widen significantly when it becomes visible in the upper section. Both upper and lower sections contain corrosion within. One side of the horn cap may display an area of wear, having a shine that is not present elsewhere on the shaft.



Only about twenty or so horn caps are known in museums or private collections.

They were almost certainly not made to fit on the end of the axle of an Iron-Age chariot, a popular suggestion when they were first discovered and studied in the nineteenth century; none have been found in Iron-Age chariot burials, of which c.120 are known. Other than one example found at Llyn Cerig Bach on Anglesey, horn caps have only been found in southern England, from Somerset to Norfolk. They were made during the middle and late Iron Age (c.300 BC to AD 43); several have been found with other Iron-Age objects, thus confirming their dating. A number were found at Ham Hill in Somerset and others have been found in

<sup>1</sup> H.E.M. Cool, 'Roman Metal Hair Pins from Southern Britain', *The Archaeological Journal*, 147 (1990), pp. 148–82.

<sup>2</sup> See BERK-AB5D68, also from this parish, donated to Oxfordshire Museum Service by Tony Pearce.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of Picardy Pins: BERK-2E4E35; DOR-CF4B74; FASW-5C5522; GLO-439E61; HAMP-F9F576; NMS-35C944; SF7845; and SWYOR-611591.

<sup>4</sup> B. Roberts, 'Adorning the Living But Not the Dead: Understanding Ornaments in Britain c.1400–1100 cal BC', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 73 (2007), pp. 135–67.

<sup>5</sup> The British Museum holds several examples including catalogue numbers 1863,0917.1 and .2 (with decorative stud detail).

the River Thames. Three have been found in Oxfordshire: at Goring, Woodeaton and Stanton Harcourt.<sup>6</sup> The Kingston Bagpuize example is the smallest yet recorded.<sup>7</sup>

*Roman Solidus (BERK- B04178) and Finger Ring (BERK-B279D7)*

Two gold objects of Roman date have been recorded from the area around Kingston Bagpuize. The first is a complete gold Roman solidus of Theodosius I (AD 388–402), only the third recorded with the PAS. On the obverse the coin depicts the two emperors, Gratian and Theodosius, seated on a throne. Between them is a Victory with outspread wings (VICTOR-IA AVGG reverse type). The coin was minted in Trier Germany, AD 388–92.<sup>8</sup> The second object (BERK-B279D7, not illustrated) is a complete finger ring with gold hoop and bezel and carved intaglio probably of cabochon. The finger ring is keeled in profile with a square-section to the lower half of the hoop. The upper half, forming the shoulders of the ring, is triangular in plan with a raised central chevron and a scrolled design on each outer edge. The bezel is oval and contains the intaglio, which depicts a female, probably Fortuna (goddess of fortune and the personification of luck).<sup>9</sup> The finger ring is currently going through the treasure process.



*Medieval Staff Terminal (BERK- 2B1D3E)*

Another uncommon object from the Kingston Bagpuize area is a complete cast copper alloy staff or sceptre terminal of late Early-medieval or medieval date. The object has only slight damage and otherwise survives in excellent condition. The object is circular in plan and rectangular in cross section. Both sides are decorated with openwork broadly reminiscent of an eight-pointed star with multiple pellets in relief all over the star and around the edges. The terminal has a short integrally cast sub-rectangular socket with a raised moulded collar with a triangular-shaped hole either side of the socket; these decorative elements probably doubled as securing points. These objects were initially identified as sword pommels,<sup>10</sup> but recent research has demonstrated their probable ecclesiastical usage as terminals to short staffs.<sup>11</sup> This suggests that the object was created in the eleventh or twelfth century.



## FINDS FROM ELSEWHERE IN OXFORDSHIRE

A small selection of the best or most unusual finds from the rest of the county follows; thousands of more objects and coins are available to view on the PAS database ([www.finds.org.uk/database](http://www.finds.org.uk/database)).

<sup>6</sup> N. Palk, 'Metal Horse Harness of the British and Irish Iron Ages', Oxford University D.Phil. thesis (1992).

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication from J. Farley, curator of British and European Iron-Age collections, British Museum.

<sup>8</sup> Roman Imperial Coinage IX, Trier 90b.

<sup>9</sup> Personal communication from M. Henig.

<sup>10</sup> J.B. Ward-Perkins, *Medieval Catalogue*, London Museum Catalogue, 7 (1940), fig. 2, no. 2.

<sup>11</sup> J. Bailey, 'Two Copper Alloy Cross-Staff Heads from Warwickshire', *MedArch*, 38 (1994), pp. 171–5.

*Roman Staff Terminal from Bix CP*  
(BERK-BF8EC4)

This cast copper staff or sceptre terminal of a male's head is of second century date. The head displays quite thick hair, denoted by slightly wavy lines from low on the forehead, around the ears and down to the upper neck. The figure sports a full beard and moustache denoted by raised, lined mouldings. The eyebrows are more suggested than depicted; the eyes are almond-shaped with dots for the pupils. The nose is broad above the moustache and the lips of the mouth are slightly downturned to form a neutral expression. The short neck terminates above the socket, which is hollow, presumably so that it can be mounted onto a staff. The



recessing of the socket may suggest that a second element, such as a ring, to secure the terminal to the staff. Several examples of staff terminals have been recorded with the PAS, including those depicting the god Mars.<sup>12</sup> The sceptre head recorded could be a depiction of Antoninus Pius (AD 138–161), if so forming part of the emperor worshipping practice known as the 'imperial cult, where dead or (especially in the provinces) even living emperors and their families were considered deities and worshipped accordingly.<sup>13</sup> A bronze bust of Marcus Aurelius from Brackley, Northamptonshire (database number BERK-E24C84), and now in the Ashmolean Museum, shares design characteristics to the Bix staff terminal including curly hair and a downcast mouth.

*Roman Nail-Cleaner Strap-End from*  
*Mixbury CP (BERK-8FA854)*

This personal grooming article, known as a 'nail-cleaner strap-end' is of copper alloy and dates to the late Roman period (c.AD 350–450). It has crescent-shaped lugs at the top and a bifid tip, presumably functioning as a nail (or even tooth) cleaner. These are not particularly common artefacts when compared to other personal objects such as finger rings or brooches, and this example is of special note because of its elaborate decoration. The



engraved design of a peacock facing a second animal, possibly a horse or griffin, is contained within curved lines. The form and decoration of this piece can be compared to a series of ten late Roman nail-cleaner strap-ends with Christian connotations, discussed by Eckardt and Crummy.<sup>14</sup> According to them, the peacock is the most common design with six out of

<sup>12</sup> LIN-71ECB3; YORYM-36E9D2; NLM-5FBEB7.

<sup>13</sup> Personal communication from M. Henig.

<sup>14</sup> H. Eckardt and N. Crummy, 'Roman or Native Bodies in Britain: The Evidence of Late Roman Nail-Cleaner Strap-Ends', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 25 (2006), pp. 83–103.

the ten examples bearing a design incorporating a peacock.<sup>15</sup> An example from Thrapston (Northants.) which depicts a peacock and a griffin either side of the tree of life is closest iconographically to the Mixbury example. Other Christian iconography seen on nail-cleaner strap-ends includes a Chi-Rho symbol, a griffin, and a fish. The majority of these strap ends are of the crescentic lug type. The religious symbolism employed on these pieces strongly suggests that they date from the mid fourth century onwards; this dating is reinforced by contextual evidence provided by a number of examples from excavated sites.<sup>16</sup> The distribution is generally limited to southern Britain.

*Medieval 'Purse-Drop' from Radley (BERK-A52E7E)*

A collection of three silver pennies of Edward the Confessor dating from AD 1042–44 were found in close proximity by three individuals during an organised club dig near Radley. A fourth coin of the same issue and almost identical to Coin B (see below) was found on the opposite side of a hedge in 2005 and is likely to be part of the same group (see BERK-359737 for record). These coins are probably from a purse-drop or small scattered hoard. Oxfordshire Museum Service hopes to acquire them.



Coin A: PACX penny, complete. Obverse: +EDPER-D REX. Diademed bust with sceptre, left. Reverse: PVLSTANN O LV. PACX. Voided long cross with circle in centre and arms terminating in crescents. Moneyer: Wulfstan, Mint: London. North N813.

Coin B: PACX penny, complete. Obverse: +EDPER-D RECX. Diademed bust with sceptre, left. Reverse: PVLFPINE ON SV. PACX. Voided long cross with circle in centre and arms terminating in crescents. Moneyer: Wulfwine, Mint: Southwark. North N813. The obverse of this coin is basically identical to the 2005 find (BERK-358737), with the same legend and wear to the R of Rex.

Coin C: PACX penny, complete. Obverse: +EDPER-D RECX. Diademed bust with sceptre, left. Reverse: GODPIINE O EXE. PACX. Voided long cross with circle in centre and arms terminating in crescents. Moneyer: Godwine, Mint: Exeter. North N813.

*Medieval Seal Matrix from Mixbury CP (BERK-06C29F)*

This copper alloy vesica seal matrix is a personal seal of late thirteenth-century date. The image in the centre of the matrix depicts a kneeling figure (probably the owner of the seal) praying in front of the standing St John the Baptist, with the pascal lamb (Agnus Dei) in the field between them. The inscription runs clockwise around the outer edge and reads 'S' PIS REGINALD LONDON[i] A P VII'. This could be read as 'The seal of Prior Reginald of (or from) London'.<sup>17</sup> John Cherry comments that the 'A' might go with 'LONDONIA' and the letter 'P' might indicate 'Prior' again and VII might suggest he was the



<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 96.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> Personal communication from John Cherry.

seventh prior. London (probably) refers to his name and not to the place of the priory. Research by the recorder has identified Reginald as the seventh prior of Bicester priory, who held office from 1261 until 1269.<sup>18</sup>

Seal matrices are not uncommon finds but examples belonging to identifiable individuals are far rarer. This seal is an important discovery for the local area and it is hoped that Oxfordshire Museum Service will be able to acquire it.

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<sup>18</sup> *VCH Oxon.* 2, p. 95.