The Portable Antiquities Scheme in Oxfordshire, 2017

In 2017 the PAS recorded 79,355 individual artefacts in 57,777 records across England and Wales, a reduction compared to 2016. The number of treasure cases continues to rise, however, with 1,268 cases reported (1,239 from England, 28 from Wales, and one from Northern Ireland). In 2017 3,255 artefacts were recorded from Oxfordshire, with Roman objects being the most numerous once again. The year marked the twentieth anniversary of the Treasure Act 1996, which came into force in September 1997. Museums held special displays showcasing some of the many treasure finds acquired by museums through the Act. One such exhibition at The Oxfordshire Museum included not only treasure finds but also a range of non-treasure items kindly loaned to the museum by numerous local detectorists. The display was due to run for six months but was extended due to its popularity.

Several commercial (non-club) rallies occurred in Oxfordshire during 2017, including a weekend event featuring over 1,000 detectorists at Leafield. With the aid of several other FLOs, local volunteers and with the support of the organizers over 500 finds were recorded at the event. These records are now mostly online and can be viewed by searching the database using the 'found at rally' criterion. Sadly Oxfordshire is attracting less reputable groups for rallies. The areas around Steventon, the Hendreds and Brightwalton (Berks.) have been heavily detected but recording has not been encouraged so very few finds have made their way on to the database. The PAS is trying to address the issue of rallies and has recently reissued the revised Code of Conduct on Responsible Metal Detecting. Guidance for landowners, many of whom are unaware of what has been found on their land, is also being finalized.

There were numerous notable finds from the county in 2017, many of which deserve more research and fuller publication. The wonderful late Roman dividers from Lyford do not feature here as they will be published fully elsewhere.[1] Notable finds can be located by entering the find's unique reference number (for example, BERK-AC4A08 or SUR-8EF3E3) into the PAS data base or by ticking the 'find of note' box on the advanced search page of the data base, which will return many more results than the few mentioned here. You can also search the data base by county, parish or object type, or just search by county to retrieve all the results for Oxfordshire (*c*.35,000 objects). The PAS strongly encourages research using its data with higher level access available to bone fide researchers. If you are interested in using our data for research and require higher level access, please contact the FLO in the first instance.

David Wynn Williams, FLO for Surrey and East Berkshire sadly died suddenly in December 2017. David recorded over 16,000 finds in the time he worked for the PAS including nearly 2,000 from Oxfordshire, of which the Watlington hoard was one of his favourites. David provided infallible support at many of the Oxfordshire rallies, and his knowledge, enthusiasm and support is greatly missed. One of his records for Oxfordshire is included below.

SELECTED FINDS

Bronze-Age Sickle from Kingston Bagpuize (BERK-AC4A08)

A complete cast copper alloy sickle of early Iron-Age date (*c*.800–600 BC). The sickle survives in remarkable condition: the double-edged blade is still sharp, and wood remained in the socket (removed for testing). The sickle has a crescentic blade with wide mid-rib and bevelled

[1] BERK-8A377C.

edges that taper to thin edges. The tip of the blade is rounded where the two bevelled edges meet. The socket is integrally cast. It is sub-conical, tapering from the open mouth to the top and is hollow throughout. Approximately half-way between the mouth and the beginning of the sickle blade are two circular peg holes located either side of the socket at equal height and distance. The casting seam is clearly visible along the socket, in line with the blade edges. The wood (as yet unidentified) is a tapering shaft with the remains of the peg still within – the peg appears to also be of wood, but further professional investigation should clarify this.

Interestingly, the outer edge of the sickle blade is thinner and sharper than the internal edge; the internal edge is usually considered to be the cutting edge on sickles, but this would appear to be a double-bladed tool. The condition of the object may suggest it had little if any use. It is possible the sickle was manufactured solely for 'ritual' deposition. This is a nationally important find; only *c.*50 sickles are known from this period. The sickle is 141.4 mm long, the blade is 27.9 mm wide (maximum) and 4.7 mm thick. The socket is 57.6 mm long and the mouth has an internal diameter of 19.6 mm. The sickle weighs 126.4 grams.

Iron-Age Brooch from Kingston Bagpuize (BERK-5952E7)

This very unusual cast copper alloy brooch probably dates to the middle Iron Age (sixth to third century BC) and is probably a British late-Hallstatt derivative brooch (Hull and Hawkes Group L). The brooch has a bulbous hollow boss with two pairs of arms that protrude from the top and bottom of the central boss. The arms extend outwards in a wide 'V'-shape. The terminals of all the arms have large, rounded but flattened knops. The lower pair of arms are slightly longer and wider and the upper pair and there is a circular recess in the centre of the arms immediately below the central boss. The recess may have held a decorative insert (such as coral). A circular-sectioned rod has been coiled around the upper pair of arms, beginning on the left arm where it is wrapped tightly, crossing over the front of the brooch to the right arm where it is coiled twice. The remaining length of the rod has been passed under one of these coils and projects downward on the reverse of the brooch, terminating in a sharp point. This crude pin mechanism does not appear to be a repair as there is no evidence for an earlier pin or alternative mechanism. The remains of the catch is located between the lower pair of arms on the reverse.

This type of brooch probably dates to the fifth century BC. It was probably locally made but may have been a continental import. A similar example from Woodeaton is illustrated in Hull and Hawkes' *Corpus of Ancient Brooches*, while another from Itchen Abbas in Hampshire has been recorded on the PAS data base.[2] These Group L brooches are rare and of varied design but the shared characteristics of the three examples suggest a relatively contemporary manufacture.

[2] BERK-4BA073.

Roman Coin from Noke (BERK-6C41FC)

This very rare copper-alloy sestertius of the empress Agrippina Senior (14 BC–AD 33) is only the second recorded by the PAS (the other being found in Devon).[3] Struck posthumously under the emperor Caligula and dating to the period AD 37–41 (Reece Period 1), the reverse depicts a Carpentum (a two-wheeled carriage) drawn left by two mules. The inscription reads: S P Q R MEMORIAE AGRIPPINAE. Mint of Rome.[4]

Roman Figurine from Crowmarsh (BERK-7F09EE)

Although incomplete, this cast copper alloy figurine of Mercury is in very good condition with many of the facial features being quite clear. Mercury is depicted standing with one foot slightly in front of the other. The right arm is bent and held in front of the body at chest height; the hand is held in a 'C'-shape indicating that the figurine probably held a caduceus, a winged staff held by messengers and heralds. The left arm is bent at the elbow and the palm is held out flat in front of the waist. Mercury is often depicted holding a purse, but no trace of an object remains. The left knee is slightly bent, and the left foot is behind the right; overall the figurine leans slightly backwards. On either side of each ankle is a small projection intended to be wings. On the body of the figurine the genitals are depicted but there are no other body features (such as chest muscles) defined. The head of the figurine has a moulded nose and small indentations for eyes. The mouth has suffered damaged but can be discerned. Hair is visible on the brow beneath a winged cap while hair also appears on either side of the head. The reverse of the figurine has defined buttocks but no other detail. The figurine does not stand up on its own and there is no evidence for any supports or attachments. It is possible that the missing caduceus could have acted as a counter-balance.

Representations of Mercury are known throughout the empire; he was the messenger of Jupiter and was also the patron of travellers and merchants. Other figurines of Mercury are recorded on the PAS data base, including from Wickenby (Lincs.),[5] Urchfont (Wilts.),[6] Lavenham (Suffolk),[7] and the Isle of Wight.[8]

Early-Medieval Folding Key from Sutton Courtenay (BERK-A6A94E)

This complete cast copper alloy folding key was probably for a small casket. The key has a hollow circular sectioned shank with a long and plain rectangular bit at a right angle to the

[3] Personal communication from Sam Moorhead, British Museum; DEV-EEA7E1.
[4] C.H.V. Sutherland, *Roman Imperial Coinage. Volume I. From 31BC to AD69 Augustus to Vitellius* (1984 edn), p. 112, no. 55.
[5] LIN-3A2272.
[6] WILT-564501.
[7] ESS-BC68F7.
[8] IOW-80A331.

shank. The opposite end of the shank has a swollen rounded terminal through which a copper alloy rivet secures the looped head. The head is formed from a flattened loop of copper alloy. The terminal arms of the loop form two small flat lugs set perpendicular to the main loop; through these lugs is the rivet. The rivet enables the key to be folded and it still moves freely.

This is a very unusual artefact. Jo Ahmet comments that 'folding keys are typically associated with the late Roman and Byzantine Mediterranean (fifth to twelfth centuries), although some suggest they may have existed in the Roman period I have not been able to reliably track them down. I think distinguishing them via their bits would be likely but… these things are practically unheard of in Britain'.[9]

A note on an example in the British Museum found in Cyprus,[10] reads 'Keys attached to rings worn on the finger or attached to a belt similar to this example are very common from early Roman times down to the Middle Ages at sites such as Corinth where many examples have been found… [They are] difficult to date precisely, though the angular form of the key-ring might suggest a late Roman (or later) period.'[11] Based on the above and the simplicity of the bit a date range of eighth to twelfth century seems appropriate.

Early Medieval Mount from Moulsford (SUR-8EF3E3)[12]

An early medieval to medieval (perhaps *c*.900–1200) copper-alloy sheet metal mount with two square holes pierced through its lower part for attachment. The mount is inscribed with a facing oval shaven head above a triangle to represent the shoulders. The face has large pointed eyes with large circular pits for the pupils, a wide straight line to represent the nose, and a small dot to represent the mouth. The head has a close-cropped fringe of hair, infilled with rough cross-hatching. A circle on the hair above the forehead may represent a diadem. The upper chest, or shoulder area, is infilled with a diagonal grid and there are two punched circles either side of the neck as well as a pair of vertical lines which each terminate in a crescent. The circles by the neck may be intended to suggest earrings but this is unclear. What the vertical lines ending in crescents are intended to represent is also unclear. Four punched circles fill the lower field and may represent buttons. The reverse is left undecorated.

The sides of the mount are parallel, and the lower edge is squared off. The head itself forms the curving upper edge of the mount but whether this was originally intended or whether this is a break along an incised line is unclear. The function of this object is uncertain. The two pierced holes are both square and suggest the object was mounted by nails, perhaps onto wood.

[9] FLO for Kent.
[10] BM, 1900,0723.1.
[11] G.R. Davidson, *Corinth, Vol. 12: The Minor Objects*, American School of Classical Studies at Athens (1952), pp. 138–9, nos. 967–1000.
[12] Information from D.W. Williams.

Late-Medieval Finger Ring from North Moreton (BERK-F12F65)

A complete cast copper alloy signet finger ring of late-medieval or early post-medieval date. The finger ring is large with an internal diameter of 22.2 mm. It is 'D'-shaped in section and has an integral oval bezel rising from the expanded shoulders of the ring. One either shoulder is a Tau Cross, one clearer than the other. The bezel has a chased design of a double-headed eagle within ropework border. The finger ring could be impressed in to wax to produce a reverse of the image and act as a signature. The size of the ring suggests it was made for a man and may have been worn over gloves.

The use of signet rings gained wider currency from the later middle ages onwards. The double-headed eagle is seen on lead tokens of Elizabeth I (1558–1603) but was used across Europe during the medieval period and is often associated with power and dominance. The Tau Cross was a symbol associated with the early Christian St Anthony of Egypt and was regarded as a form of crucifix in the Eastern or Orthodox Christian tradition. It also interested St Francis.

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