The Portable Antiquities Scheme in Oxfordshire, 2018

In 2018 the PAS recorded 71,662 artefacts in 50,743 records across England and Wales, a reduction compared to 2017. The number of treasure cases continues to rise, however, with 1,267 cases reported from England and Northern Ireland (the figures for Wales were not available at the time of writing). In December 2018 the British Museum released the Treasure Annual Report for 2017 on behalf of the government. Heritage Minister Michael Ellis announced the first major review of the Treasure Act in fifteen years following a 'record-breaking' year of discoveries; in the twenty years since the Treasure Act, there has been a 1,500 per cent increase in the reporting of such finds. The minister said that

> The search for buried treasure has captivated people's imagination for centuries. And in recent years the number of finds has continued to increase. However, some outstanding artefacts of great archaeological and cultural importance have been lost to private sellers simply because they do not meet the current criteria for treasure. These new proposals will help our museums acquire these treasures and make it harder for nationally important finds to be sold for personal profit.

The consultation closed at the end of April 2019. Any amendments will require secondary legislation and will have to be approved by both Houses of Parliament.

In Oxfordshire, several commercial (non-club) rallies took place during 2018, including a weekend event involving more than 1,000 detectorists at Leafield. Another large rally is planned on the Cornbury estate in September with up to 1,500 detectorists expected. The PAS has changed its approach to FLOs attending rallies to record – it is now against policy for FLOs to do so; however, the size of the Oxfordshire 'Detectival' and the numbers of foreign detectorists it attracts has led to an exemption for this event. Oxfordshire remains an attractive county for rallies. The less reputable groups are still visiting the county (around Steventon, Drayton and areas around Chipping Norton). Despite the FLO contacting organisers to request finds be recorded after the event very few have materialised and anti-PAS propaganda is being spread by some organisers. Other clubs, organisations and the metal-detecting magazines are very supportive of the PAS and are against the apparent increase in 'closed' disreputable groups; they also report illegal activity such as detecting on Scheduled Monuments or the non-reporting of treasure finds. The PAS is trying to address non-compliance, and it is hoped that the review of the Act may tackle some of these issue. Oxfordshire Museum Service has been successful in winning funding from the Barker Fund for an outreach programme aimed specifically at landowners, most of whom are unaware of what is being found on their land, objects that they have a legal right to. This project will commence later in 2019.

In 2018 there were 3,648 artefacts recorded from Oxfordshire, an 11 per cent increase on the previous year, and thirty-two treasure cases. Roman period artefacts were once again the most numerous, with 2,322 items recorded. A figurine of Minerva found at Hailey was one of the star attractions at the Treasure Annual Report launch in December. This is included below, as are several of the most important or impressive finds from the last year. It was quite a year for such finds in the county and difficult to choose which objects to include here. Many of these finds deserve further research and fuller publication in their own right. A decorated Anglo-Saxon relic box from Leafield, the PAS's 35,000th record, has been studied by John Blair and Catherine Hill and will be published in detail. I am grateful to them for their work on this lovely object, which has been donated to Oxfordshire Museum Service by the finder.

SELECTED FINDS

Bronze-Age Bracelet from Merton (BERK-7B524E)[1]

Discovered during a metal-detecting rally, this complete annular bracelet/arm-ring dates to the middle Bronze Age, *c*.1400–1250 BC. Known as a Liss-type bracelet, the object is a solid band of copper alloy, oval in section and in very good condition with brown patina. The entire object is decorated with deeply incised or engraved panels that have been executed with some degree of care. The complex decoration comprises panels of rows of stacked chevrons creating a herringbone pattern, separated by dividing sections of ten or more lines of vertical bands to the circumference of the bracelet. The three central panels comprise eight or nine horizontal bands that widen to create an oval, the centre of which is decorated with six vertical bands. As an oval, the external diameter is 95.5 mm by 83.7 mm with an internal diameter of 66.8 mm by 52.1 mm and a width of 12.9 mm. It weighs in at a heavy 346.5 grams.

Similar plain and incised Liss-type bracelets are not common finds. They are known from the Taunton phase of the Bronze Age (1,400–1,200 BC) onwards, mainly from southern Britain. These bracelets concentrate in Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and West Sussex, while examples are also known from Suffolk and Norfolk. While some bracelets come from hoards containing items such as torcs, pins, axes, palstaves and other middle Bronze-Age artefacts no other objects were found in association with this example, however several finds of the same date have been found in the area.[2] These Ornament Horizon objects are comparatively rarer than tools and weapons. Similar examples were found in the Ebbesbourne Wake hoard,[3] and a hoard from Hurstborne Priors, Hampshire.[4]

[1]   Image by Rod Trevaskus on behalf of Oxfordshire Museum Service.
[2]   Other recent middle Bronze-Age finds from Merton include complete and fragments of spearheads, a palstave axe and a hoard of palstaves (see OXON-508051, below). Further research into this area would be beneficial.
[3]   C.N. Moore and M. Rowlands, *Bronze Age Metalwork in Salisbury Museum* (1972), pp. 63–5, plate XV.
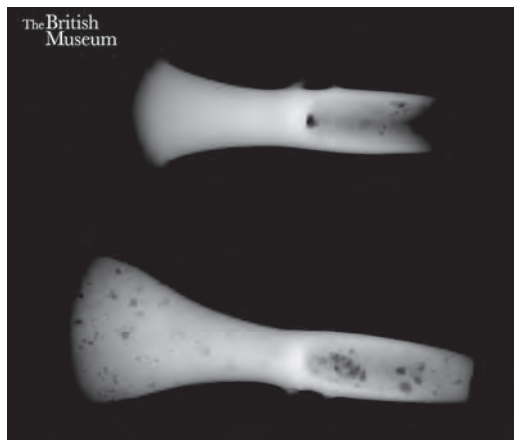[4]   SUR-590F5D (no.1); and see also FASW-DA4387.

Bronze-Age Hoard from Merton (OXON-508051)[5]

Late in the afternoon of 23rd December a detectorist on a small rally discovered two looped palstave axes about 11 inches below ground level. Looking in the hole he saw another and stopped digging and called the organiser. The FLO was attending the rally and with only two hours of daylight left and the weather closing in, the decision was made to hastily block-lift the find as its security could not be guaranteed over the Christmas period. The block (which weighed 35 kg) was driven to the British Museum for micro-excavation by the conservation department in January 2019.[6] The excavation revealed a collection of thirteen axes, making it the largest palstave hoard from the county.[7] During the block-lift it was noted that the axes may have been deposited in a ditch terminal, but further work is needed to confirm this. Before removal of the palstaves from the block, photogrammetry was undertaken to record in 3D the exact position of the objects.[8] Once removed from the block, all axes were X-rayed; the majority had significant casting flaws, possibly a reason for deposition. This is further supported by the number of unfinished axes present – Hayley Bullock commented that:

> Seven of the thirteen axes had not been finished after casting and still had casting lines from their moulds. A small amount of manual cleaning was undertaken on the edges of the axes using a scalpel under magnification… This revealed that one of the axes was decorated with a herringbone pattern down one edge of its blade. The cleaning also revealed that some of the axes had been made from the same moulds.

The hoard dates from the middle Bronze Age. As the hoard constitutes treasure, the

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5   All images copyright Trustees of the British Museum.
6   By Hayley Bullock, Senior Conservator, British Museum.
7   Personal communication from Roger M. Thomas.
8   Personal communication from Hayley Bullock.

axes will be reported on by Neil Wilkin ahead of the coroner's inquest.[9] It is hoped Oxfordshire Museum Service will be able to acquire the hoard. Fuller publication will follow in due course.

Iron-Age Miniature Votive Wheel from Milton-under-Wychwood (GLO-E82DE1)[10]
This form of artefact is relatively rare and the PAS has only recorded six other examples, this being the first from Oxfordshire.
Dating to the late Bronze or early Iron Age (*c*.1,000–500 BC), the copper alloy miniature wheel is circular in plan with a trapezoidal shaped 'axel' from which four spokes radiate before joining the outer rim. The rim of the wheel and the spokes are rectangular in cross section. There is a circular perforation in the centre of the axle which appears to have been drilled. The upper corners of the model are slightly rounded while the reverse are angular.

Comparable artefacts had been recorded in the late Bronze-Age/ early Iron-Age assemblage from the votive site at Flag Fen, Peterborough, amongst the Iron-Age Salisbury hoard, and also the Hounslow Hoard, dating to the late Iron Age.[11] A more elaborate three-armed example is also known from Meare,[12] a site dating to *c*.120 BC to 100 AD.

Iron-Age Scabbard Chape from West Hendred (WREX-C7F53A)[13]
This cast copper alloy La Tène I dagger or sword chape dates to the early Iron Age (800–400 BC). The chape is anchor-shaped and consists of a rectangular (oval in section) central section which narrows at the tip. From this project two curving and tapering arms which create the anchor shape. These arms terminate in circular bulbous projections, which have a slight indentation on one side only. The terminals are attached to the main body of the object by a small strip of copper alloy. There are traces of moulded decoration on the central part of the chape and down the centre is a line of small dots; these flare out towards the base of the object to create an inverted 'V'-shape. The dots continue along the lower edge of the object. The back of the chape

9   Curator, Bronze-Age Collections, Department of Britain, Europe and Prehistory, British Museum.
10   Identified and recorded by Kurt Adams, FLO for Gloucestershire and Avon.
11   E.M. Jope, *Early Celtic Art in the British Isles* (2000), plates 161o and 199i.
12   J.M. Coles, *Meare Village East: The Excavations of A. Bulleid and H. St. George Gray 1932–1956*, Somerset Levels Paper, 13 (1987), p. 71, no. E84.
13   Written and recorded by Susie White, FLO for North Wales.

is undecorated. The base has an iron pin that has corroded, probably securing the thinner piece of copper alloy within (the remains of the scabbard).

Similar La Tène I chapes can be found in Stead and Rigby's book on the Morel Collection.[14] These are all dated to the sixth century BC. A similar example was found a few miles away at West Hanney several years ago (LVPL-FCE522). Other examples on the PAS database include HAMP-0219F8 and NMS-9A7C03.

Iron-Age Coin from Ipsden (BERK-01E4EA)[15]

This worn gold Iron Age stater, a continental Gallo-Belgic issue, dates to the late second or early first century BC, perhaps *c*.130–75 BC. The obverse depicts the laureate head of Apollo right while the reverse depicts a horse and rider left with a wheel behind the horse, a decorated 'croissant' below and an uncertain motif in front. The closest parallels for this coin appear in a series of staters and quarter staters termed 'type de Crainvilliers "au croissant"' by Delestree and Tache,[16] which were struck in eastern Gaul perhaps as far as north-west Switzerland. The staters published by Delestree and Tache differ slightly from the current example, particularly in terms of the bust type, however it likely falls into the same group as DT 3074.

Roman Statuette of Minerva from Hailey (OXON-7B00CD)[17]

This wonderful cast copper and lead alloy statuette of the Roman goddess Minerva featured at the PAS Treasure Annual Report launch at the British Museum in 2018.[18] It created considerable media interest, both nationally and internationally. It was discovered over a decade ago by an unknown detectorist on land at Hailey, near Witney. When the finder showed the statue to the then landowner, they decided it was probably a Grand Tour souvenir and put it in a margarine tub where it lay for the next ten years. In 2018 another detectorist and friend of the landowner mentioned he was visiting the FLO to record some finds, so the landowner suggested he

could show the statue. Upon unwrapping the statue from the kitchen roll it was immediately apparent it was genuine and of some importance. Dating to the period AD 43–200, the statue is in three pieces, with the head and part of the lower right arm being detached from the body. The lower left arm and possibly a small section of the base is also missing. Overall, the statue is in very good condition. Minerva stands with her left knee bent and head slightly to the left, dressed in robes and wearing an aegis bearing the head of Medusa on her upper left arm. Minerva is wearing sandals that protrude from the hem of her robe. The robe is fastened at the shoulders by two silver rivets, imitating brooches. There are also two large silver rivets on either side of the helmet while the crest of the helmet is missing from an old break. Minerva's eyes are accentuated with small silver rivets and her mouth has silver inlay. The missing right hand probably held a spear while the left hand may have been supporting a shield, now also missing.[19] The underside of the base of the statue has two small indentations, possibly mounting holes for situating on a wooden plinth or base. This statue is probably from a temple or household shrine. The total weight of the remaining pieces is 791.5 grams.

As the silver rivets on the head of the statue and on the robe of the figure contain more than 10 per cent precious metal, they are considered independent features themselves (being imitation brooches and mounts) so they would qualify as treasure under the stipulations of the Treasure Act 1996. By association, the now separate elements of the statue also qualify as treasure. A report is being finalised for the coroner and an inquest is expected to be held shortly. Once this has taken place more research will be conducted and an in-depth article written.[20] Both the British Museum and the Oxfordshire Museum Service have expressed interest in acquiring the 'Minerva in the Margarine' for their collections.

Roman Coin of Allectus from Childrey (ASHM-53A7D8)

A copper-alloy radiate of Allectus, dating to the period AD 293–296. Reverse shows Oceanus with one foot placed on a dolphin and the other on a gallery. Reece period 14; mint of London. The reverse design probably represents the emperor's naval power. This design is unique on a coin of Allectus.

Anglo-Saxon Brooch from Curbridge (BERK-06ED81)

An incomplete cast copper alloy early medieval radiate-headed brooch, dating to the sixth century. Only the head plate and a fragment of the bow remains. The head plate is semi-circular with seven equidistant, integral projections/tabs on the outside edge. Tabs one, four and seven are sub-rectangular and solid whereas the intervening tabs are triangular with circular apertures within and moulded, rounded cells on the peaks – these are hollow but retain traces of a white substance, possibly a paste or a coral insert. All of the tabs have moulded horizontal and/ or vertical linear decoration. The centre of the head is bounded by a raised semi-circular rib within which is a decorative panel of vertical and horizontal lines. The remaining section of the bow is ribbed on the outer edges with a third rib arranged

centrally. The reverse of the head plate has two integral, vertical, perforated lugs with traces of the iron pin hinge.

Although the brooch is an early medieval radiate-headed brooch, its size sets it apart, being similar in size to Great Square Headed brooches. Radiate head brooches were manufactured by the Franks on the Continent although there is evidence for this type of brooch also being manufactured in Kent and possibly Oxfordshire,[21] where this example is from. This type of brooches is found from the Isle of Wight (IOW-B52767) to Yorkshire (YORYM-2A90CB) and dated the first half of the sixth century by Werner (1961), and to Kentish Phase III (530 to 570) by Parfitt and Brugmann.[22] This is the first example with seven tabs recorded on the database, and indeed the first of this design and size. The finder David Oliver has kindly donated this object to Oxfordshire County Museum Service.

Late-Medieval Purse Bar from Northmoor (BERK-C3DBF9)

A complete cast copper alloy purse bar dating from the late medieval/early post-medieval period, *c*.1450–1550. The purse arms are complete with rounded knop terminals and three hoop projecting from the underside of the arm to which the bag of the purse would have been attached. There is an inscription in niello which extends over both the front and back of the arms; it reads AVI MAR[IA GRA]CI PL[ENA] IhR (?) in centre and DOIVNIAS [...] NCIN (misspelling or abbreviated version of 'AVE MARIA GRACIA PLENA DOMINUS TECUM' which translates as 'Hail Mary full of grace may the Lord be with you'). The sub-square central body has been decorated in niello on one face. The portrait is of a male wearing a rounded collar. It is difficult to establish if the figure is wearing anything on the head such as a crown.

Similar purse bars have been discussed by Ward Perkins.[23] He classifies this type as Type A2 which is distinguished from the other types by its lack of ornamental decoration, and the use of an inlayed religious or talismanic inscription. Ward-Perkins suggests that this type dates to *c*.1490. More recent dating suggest a date of 1450–1550. The apparent use of a portrait very much resembling a high-status male flanked by the numerals VI strongly suggest that the portrait is intended to be a king. Two royals of the period could fit this, both of whom are often portrayed in similar garb. First is Henry VI (reigned 1422–61, and 1470–1) and second Edward VI (reigned 1547–53), although the latter would be the very end of the suggested chronological spread. As Laura Burnett, Finds Liaison Officer for Somerset has observed, the religious nature of the inscription coupled with 'the portrayals of Henry VI as Saint and Martyr' would make it more likely that the portrait here represents Henry VI.

Other 'finds of note' recorded during 2018 include an early Iron-Age 'winged' scabbard

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[21] A. MacGregor and E. Bolick, *A Summary Catalogue of the Anglo-Saxon Collections (Non-Ferrous Metals)*, BAR BS, 230 (1993), p. 147.

[22] K. Parfitt and B. Brugmann, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery on Mill Hill, Deal, Kent*, Society of Medieval Archaeology (1997), pp. 43, 105, and table 11.

[23] J.B. Ward-Perkins, *The London Museum Medieval Catalogue* (1940), pp. 163–5.

chape (BERK-8D38B7), a Gallo-Belgic potin (BERK-0062A3), a Roman Republican denarius of Brutus (BERK-C5A6C8), a miniature 'altar' (BH-C3F333), a wonderful lion's head terminal (BERK-3243DB), and a steelyard (BERK-8EEB1F). The finds included above can be located by entering the find's unique reference number (for example, BERK-AC4A08 or SUR-8EF3E3) 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 parish or object type (for example, 'finger ring'), or just search by county to retrieve all the results for Oxfordshire (*c*.38,000 objects). The PAS strongly encourages research using its data with higher level access available to bona 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.

ANNI BYARD, PAS