

The Portable Antiquities Scheme in Oxfordshire, 2019

In 2019 the PAS logged 53,511 entries recording c.80,869 artefacts across England and Wales.¹ The number of treasure cases continued to rise, with 1,262 cases reported from England alone.² In December 2018 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 was passed, there has been a 1,500 per cent increase in the reporting of such finds. The aim of this review, which is likely to affect metal-detecting activity, is to improve the treasure process so that it is more efficient, sustainable, more rational and easier to understand, whilst remaining focused on the aim of preserving significant finds for public collections. The consultation for the review closed at the end of April 2019 and its results are still being processed by the Department for Culture Media and Sport. Any amendments will require secondary legislation and will have to be approved by both houses of parliament.

Between 2019 and 2020 the PAS has updated its guidance on Finds Liaison Officers (FLOs) attending rallies. Its current approach is that, in general, FLOs do not attend rallies to record finds. The reason for this is that large-scale metal-detecting events do not provide the ideal circumstances for PAS staff to record finds in the field, and can therefore result in the loss of much archaeological data, including information about the findspot. Therefore, finders attending such events should ensure they follow the Code of Practice for Responsible Metal-Detecting in England and Wales (2017) and record their finds retrospectively. However, there is scope for FLOs to attend rallies to promote best practice and also to take in finds for recording later, but not (normally) to record finds, barring exceptional circumstances. The size of the Oxfordshire ‘Detectival’ and the number of foreign detectorists it attracts has led to an exemption for this event.

Due to the good working relationship Oxfordshire has built up with Detectival, the rally organisers often have their own recording team at larger events who upload finds to the PAS data base. Finds that require an export licence (any object recovered from the soil which is over fifty years old) are taken in at a designated tent at the rally for recoding by the rally organiser’s staff, and the resulting records are checked by a FLO. Items of potential treasure are taken in by the FLO. In 2019 Detectival covered 1,000 acres and was attended by 950 detectorists. Over two days 315 finds were recorded by the PAS team, despite the land being detected intensively in 2018. One of the discoveries was a fragment of an Anglo-Saxon saucer brooch (OXON-70CCD7), which refitted exactly with a fragment found in 2018 which was donated to Oxfordshire Museum Service. The 2019 fragment was also donated.

Oxfordshire remains an attractive county for rallies. The less reputable ‘closed’ groups are still visiting the county, especially around Steventon, Drayton, and Chipping Norton. Despite the FLO contacting organisers to request finds be recorded after the event very few have materialised. Other clubs, organisations and the metal-detecting magazines are supportive of the PAS and oppose the apparent increase in ‘closed’ 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 issues. Oxfordshire Museum Service was successful in winning funding from the Barker Fund for an outreach programme aimed specifically at landowners, most of whom are unaware of

¹ Accurate as of the 23 April 2020.

² Figures for Wales and Northern Ireland were not available at the time of writing.

what is being found on their land, objects that they have a legal right to. This project was due to commence in 2019 but was delayed as a result of the FLO post becoming vacant (on Anni Byard's departure after eleven years). At the time of writing the plan was to commence later in 2020.

OXFORDSHIRE FINDS PROFILE

In 2019 2,453 artefacts were recorded in 2,108 records for the county. This represents c.67 per cent of the number of finds found in the previous year; however, this is proportionate to the number of finds recorded in the previous year when accounting for the lack of a FLO for the last third of 2019. Forty-five treasure cases were reported, twenty-seven of which were reported to the Oxfordshire FLO.

The number of finds recorded appears to be part of a growing trend for a relatively consistent number of artefacts brought to the PAS in the region (Fig. 1), following nearly a decade of growth. There are 'spikes' visible in the number of finds recorded in Oxfordshire, but these can be accounted for by particularly large coin hoards, notably the Chalgrove hoard (PAS-879F02) which, while found in 2003, had its record created in 2012, and two further hoards found in Stoke Lyne in 2016 (BERK-2C9948 and BERK-A39DED). In 2019, 132 of the county's 323 parishes had at least one find reported from them (Fig. 2). While the overall distribution of finds is not notably different to the established distribution seen in years prior to 2019, two parishes had artefacts recorded for the first time, namely Oddington and Salford. As a result, only thirty parishes are now lacking any finds on the PAS data base (Fig. 3).

Roman period artefacts were, once again, the most numerous finds reported in Oxfordshire, making up 44 per cent of all records from the region and 50 per cent of all artefacts (Table 1). This is slightly lower than the overall proportion of Roman finds reported in the county since the inception of the PAS. The slight shortfall is made up by a few more medieval and particularly post-medieval finds.

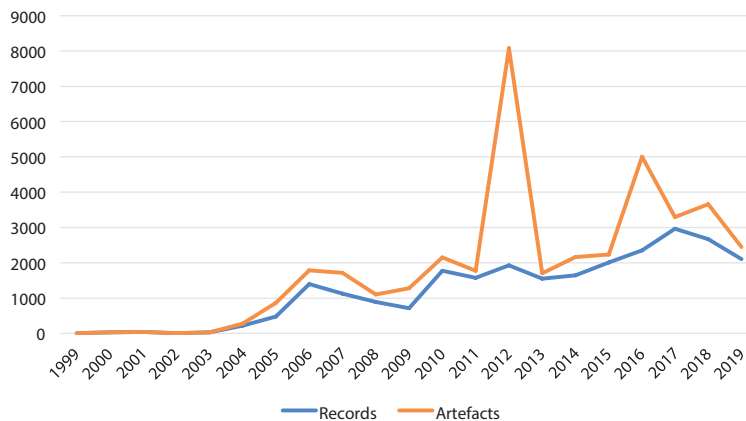


Fig. 1. Count of records and artefacts for Oxfordshire found on the PAS data base. Data accurate as of the 22nd of April 2020.

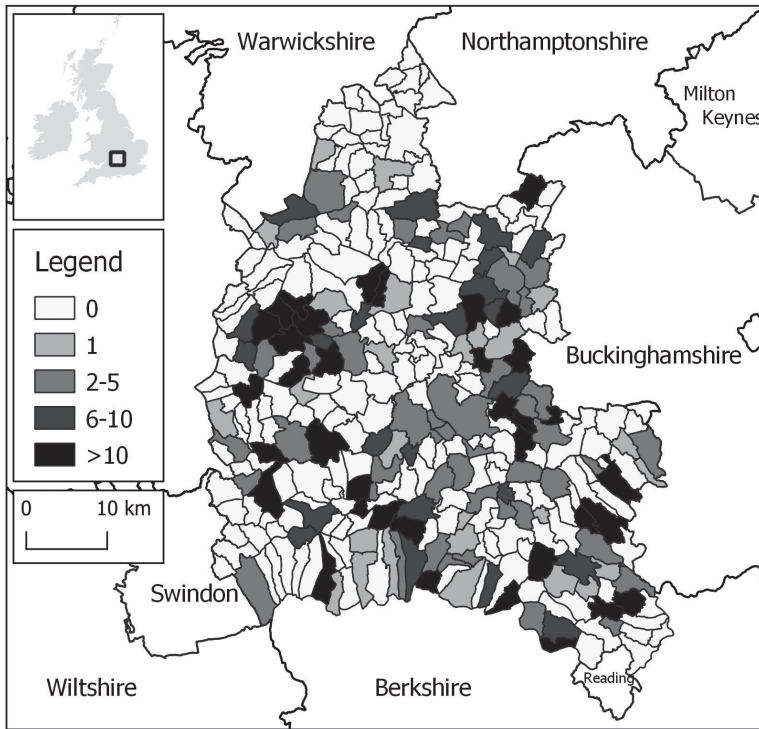


Fig. 2. Oxfordshire finds in 2019.

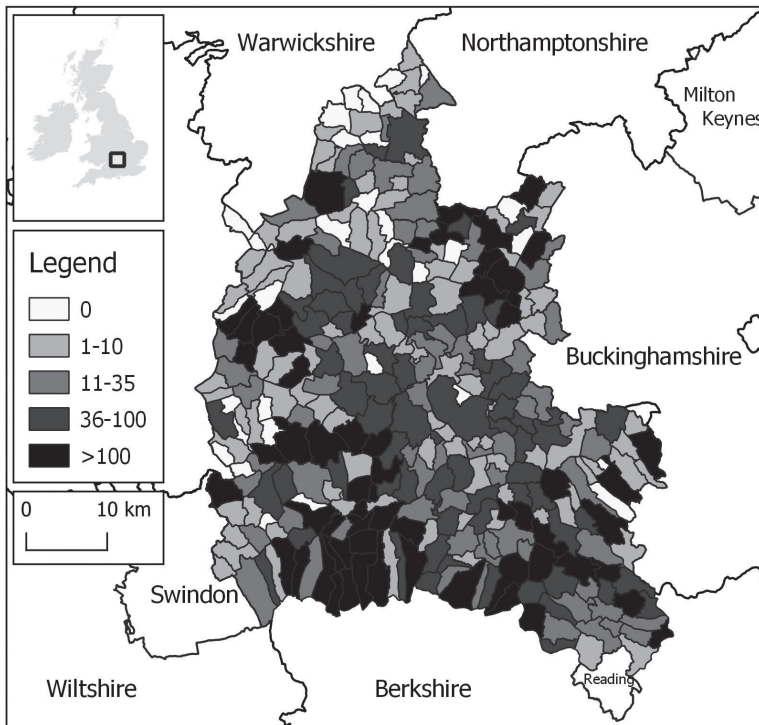


Fig. 3. Oxfordshire finds since the inception of the PAS.

Table 1. Oxfordshire PAS finds

Broad Period	Oxfordshire Finds Profile		2019 Finds Profile	
	Records	Artefacts	Records	Artefacts
Palaeolithic	43	48	1	1
Mesolithic	179	771	1	1
Neolithic	307	720	16	16
Bronze Age	447	646	38	49
Iron Age	1181	1265	52	52
Roman	11867	23143	916	1221
Early Medieval	910	961	104	104
Medieval	4824	5660	418	425
Post Medieval	5299	5565	525	536
Modern	113	137	16	16
Byzantine	2	2	0	0
Greek And Roman Provincial	15	15	1	1
Unknown	317	729	20	31
Grand Total	25504	39668	2108	2453

SELECTED FINDS

*Neolithic Polished Stone Axehead from Aston (HAMP-E4CAF7)*³

This ground and polished axehead is of Neolithic date (c.4000–2100 BC), and made from an igneous greenstone common in areas such as Devon and Cornwall around the edges of the granite intrusions that form Dartmoor, Exmoor, and Land's End. Which type it falls into would need to be established by petrographic analysis. However, its presence in Abingdon, along with a further polished axe head (BERK-DD4484), helps demonstrate the repeated curation and transportation of high-quality stone tools across Britain during prehistory.⁴

*Late Bronze-Age Chape from Rotherfield Peppard (BERK-EF7823)*⁵

This copper alloy 'bag-shaped' dagger scabbard chape is associated with the Carp's Tongue complex of the late Bronze Age. The chape is formed from a single sheet of copper alloy, beaten and folded over to form the bulbous crescent shape. A section of the back has been lost in antiquity, the front, which remains intact, has three rivet fixing holes. There is the remnant of one hole, to the broken rear of the chape.

Only one other very similar form of this chape is recorded on the PAS data base (NARC-5DEF37) while other 'bag-shaped' chapes are also limited in number (good examples being HAMP-095061, WILT-D4F151 and NMS-99FB70). A parallel for these other bag-shaped chapes is in the Mininis Bay hoard, Kent.⁶ A further similar bag-shaped chape with two peg holes is part of the Salisbury hoard (British Museum: 1961,006.7; 1998,0901.149).

³ Identified and recorded by Ms Katie Hinds, FLO for Hampshire.

⁴ P. Schauer et al., 'British Neolithic Axehead Distributions and Their Implications', *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* (2019) pp. 1–24.

⁵ Identified by Helena Costas and Mr Peter Reavil and recorded by Rod Trevasus.

⁶ B. O'Connor, *Cross-Channel Relations in the Later Bronze Age: Relations between Britain, North-Eastern France, and the Low Countries during the Later Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age*, BAR, 91 (1980), fig. 59, no. 12;

Where chapes and scabbards fittings are found together, they are always found with Carp's Tongue sword fragments.⁷ Bag-shaped chapes are therefore associated with the Carp's Tongue (CT) complex/horizon.⁸ While hoards with these chapes are primarily distributed in south-east England and in northern France, a small number of outliers are now known in Ireland.⁹



*Roman Vessel Mount from Drayton (SOM-EABDC5)*¹⁰

This Roman cast copper-alloy vessel mount is in the form of the bust of a young Nero probably dating to AD 49 to 60. The bust is shown wearing a cloak over both shoulders. This projects slightly forward from the breast in the centre of the front in what appears to be a plain downwards fold suggesting the cloak is joined by a brooch or with a knot. The tunic under the cloak is gathered with pleats running vertically down from this central point. The face of the bust depicts a young male with the slightly projecting ears and short hair with full fringe. The features are delicately moulded, the eyes oval with clearly delineated lower lids and brow line. The nose is triangular in plan and straight to



aquiline in profile. The mouth is narrow, but both lips are visible. The chin projects slightly and is rounded. The bust is flattened at the back such that the details at the top and sides of the head can be seen but not the back of the head nor the back of the upper part of the torso.

Mounts of near identical form and style have been recorded by the PAS across Britain (HAMP-F10D82, Bbh-84F731, NLM-CCF911, DOR-6E73F1) the last of which has been published by Sally Worrell and John Pearce,¹¹ and by Miles Russell,¹² with the suggestion that the bust is of the young Nero around the time of his adoption as co-heir by Claudius in AD 50.

C.E. Turner, 'A Re-Interpretation of the Late Bronze Age Metalwork Hoards of Essex and Kent', University of Glasgow Ph.D. thesis (1998), vol. 3, p. 120, no. 19/48.

⁷ Turner, 'A Re-Interpretation of the Late Bronze Age Metalwork Hoards', p. 53.

⁸ O'Connor, *Cross-Channel Relations in the Later Bronze Age*, pp. 190–1.

⁹ Ibid. p. 190, list 161; S. Gerloff, 'Hallstatt Fascination: 'Hallstatt' Buckets, Swords and Chapes from Britain and Ireland', in H. Roche et al. (eds.), *From Megaliths to Metal: Essays in Honour of George Eogan* (2004), pp. 124–54, fig. 17.9, 3.

¹⁰ Identified and recorded by Laura Burnett, FLO for Somerset and Devon, and Mrs Nonn Bound.

¹¹ J. Pearce and S. Worrell, *50 Roman Finds from the Portable Antiquities Scheme* (2012).

¹² M. Russell, 'A First-Century Roman Copper-Alloy Portrait Bust from Tarrant Rushton', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society*, 137 (2016), pp. 167–72.

Merovingian Tremissis from Ascott-under-Wychwood (OXON-1C2E42)

A complete early medieval Merovingian gold tremissis dating c.560–85 and belonging late in the pseudo-Imperial phase or the early in the subsequent 'National Coinage'. The coin is comparable to others struck at Cirilia and Rodez, France.¹³ Merovingian tremisses are rare to the west of Oxford, tending to be discovered in eastern counties, especially from Suffolk to Kent. This is one of just three such coins recorded between Oxford and Worcester.

*Medieval Pilgrim Badge from Lewknor (OXON-A9145B)*

This fifteenth-century pilgrim badge is particularly well preserved. It depicts the standing figure of Thomas Becket as archbishop of Canterbury on a hatched background. Beckett wears a mitre and other vestments and holds an archbishop's cross staff in his left hand, his right hand raised in blessing. A nimbus (a solid disk of light or gold) surrounds his head. An identical badge is illustrated in Spencer's catalogue.¹⁴ Spencer notes that at the time of his writing this was the first of its type recorded. A search of the data base reveals no others recorded by the PAS.

*Penny of Stephen, Struck in Oxford from near Wheatley (OXON-4E677E)*

A medieval silver penny of Stephen (1135–54), irregular issue, midlands and south-western area, struck by Rogier at the Oxford mint.¹⁵ This is only the second coin of its type known for the moneyer Rogier at Oxford, the other found in 1989 as part of the Wicklewood hoard (Norfolk) and now within the



¹³ M. Prou, *Les Monnaies Mérovingiennes* (1892), p. 395, nos. 1910–11; A. de Belfort, *Description Générale des Monnaies Mérovingiennes* (1892), pp. 428, 445, nos. 1509, 1570; G. Depeyrot, *Le Numéraire Mérovingien L'Âge D'Or*, 5 vols. (1998), vol. 4, p. 119, nos. 3–2A.

¹⁴ B. Spencer, *Salisbury Museum Medieval Catalogue, Part II: Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges* (2000), fig. 13, and discussed on p. 17.

¹⁵ J.J. North, *English Hammered Coinage: Volume I. Early Anglo-Saxon to Henry III, c.600–1272* (1994), pp. 206–7, no. 887; R.P. Mack, *Stephen and the Anarchy 1135–54* (1966), pp. 69–70, nos. 181–2.

collection at the British Museum (accession no. CM 1990, 6–29, 20).¹⁶ This example has been acquired by the Ashmolean Museum.

Post-Medieval Sun Dial from North Leigh (OXON-FD3896)

A complete copper alloy pocket or portable sundial dating to the post-medieval period (1600–1800). It is made of two annular bands which have been soldered together internally where a drawn wire semi-circular loop attaches them together at their outer edges. The nodus is a thin sheets of copper alloy with out-turned terminals that runs along the central groove. It would have been completed by a washer-like ring, and it was the spot of sunlight passing through this ring on to the inside of the dial which was used to indicate the time. The dots and the gradations would permit fractions of an hour to be read when the dial was aligned to the sun according to the date read from the outer side. There is a small loop of copper alloy wire riveted through the body of the dial.

At the point where the band is pierced the upper half has the letters I A S O N D stamped on it (for the second six months of the year) facing upwards. On the lower half are the letters I F M A M I for the first six months, facing downwards. The inner face shows two bands of numbers bordered and separated by four engraved parallel longitudinal lines reading from left to right above: 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 and below: 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1. The number 12 appears midway between the two lines. All the numbers lie approximately opposite the point on the outer face of the band where the months are marked and where the band is pierced.



Post Medieval Lead Trade Token from Radley (OXON-5D1827)

This post-medieval lead alloy farthing trade token was issued by grocer John Hall of Abingdon probably c.AD 1667. The token's obverse depicts the grocer's arms and the legend (from 12 o'clock) reads: HIS IOHN HALL while the reverse reads FARTHING ABINGDON with the initials I H in the centre. Most copper alloy tokens are better aligned (reading for example IOHN



¹⁶ M. Allen, *The Mints and Moneyers of England and Wales, 1066–1158* (2012), p. 114.

HALL HIS from 12 o'clock). There is no record of John Hall issuing a farthing token in lead or copper alloy, although he did issue a halfpenny copper alloy token in 1667 (Norweb 56); it therefore appears to be a new discovery.¹⁷ It is also unusual being made in lead, although several lead alloy trade tokens are known from both Oxfordshire and Berkshire. The farthing token is slightly larger than its copper alloy counterparts, and as it is in lead it is heavier too.

Other 'finds of note' recorded during 2019 include a well preserved flint knife (OXON-3027C2), several fine examples of Iron-Age, Roman and early medieval brooches (OXON-C88E7E, OXON-41D6FE, OXON-2B81C6, BERK-09637C, FAJN-1C4F54), an unusually well preserved medieval iron sword pommel (KENT-72EE58) found at Detectival 2019 and brought to the finder's local FLO, a complete early medieval slide key (OXON-2A8EEC), a well-preserved gilded strap fitting (OXON-7E3CAC), and a fine example of a Roman toilet tool (OXON-2C8357). The finds included above can be located by entering the find's unique reference number 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 (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, and higher level access is available to bona fide researchers. If you are interested in using our data for research and require higher level access, please contact the FLO (Edward Caswell) in the first instance.

ANNI BYARD and EDWARD CASWELL, PAS

¹⁷ Tim Everson agrees that this token is a new discovery in paranumismatica.