

The Debate

Preserving the Past: Recording Archaeological Finds Made by the Public

By Michael Lewis



Metal-detecting in Hertfordshire as part of an archaeological survey.

Antiquities law in Great Britain is amongst the most liberal in Europe. Searching for antiquities is legal, and since archaeology is unlicensed, anyone can do it. In England and Wales, it is the landowner, not the State, that normally has best title to anything found on their land. It might seem that this situation puts at risk the historic environment, but in fact the story over the last 20 years is more positive. Although there are unscrupulous individuals, many people searching for archaeology, most being metal-detectorists, work within the law and report their finds.

The main mechanism of the State to protect archaeology is through the “scheduling” of ancient monuments (Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act 1979) and the Treasure Act 1996. In England alone there are almost 20,000 scheduled monuments, and it is an offence to excavate such sites without a licence; this restriction includes the use of metal-detectors. The State also requires anyone (including archaeologists) finding Treasure to report these finds.

The Treasure Act states that all objects at least 300 years old with at least 10 per cent gold or silver must be reported. Also, all coins from the same find (two or more), provided they are at least 300 years old are Treasure; there

must be at least ten of them if the coins are base-metal. All objects found in association with Treasure are also potential Treasure, as are prehistoric base-metal assemblages, and finds that would have been Treasure Trove.



Copper-alloy Anglo-Saxon “Winchester style” strap-end from Dorset (PAS: DEV-264F62), recorded by the PAS.

The purpose of the Act is to enable museums to acquire the most important archaeological finds. In such cases a reward, equal to the market value of the find, is paid to the finder/landowner: usually split 50/50. The value is recommended by the (independent) Treasure Valuation Committee to be agreed by the Secretary of State. Treasure finds not acquired by museums are “disclaimed” and returned to the finder/landowner. Since the Act became law, the number of cases reported has increased from 201 in 1998 to 1268 in 2017.

In 1997, the Government established pilot schemes to encourage the voluntary recording of all archaeological finds not covered by the Act. This happens through a national network of archaeologists known as Finds Liaison Officers (FLOs) working for the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). The Scheme is managed by the British Museum and the National Museum of Wales, and funded through Government grant-in-aid and local partner contributions.

The primary aim of the PAS is to advance knowledge by recording archaeological finds made by the public. Its 40 FLOs are based in museums and other heritage organisations, and to date have recorded over 1.3 million finds: see <http://finds.org.uk>. Although this data is made publicly available online, precise findspot information is only shared with archaeologists and *bona fide* researchers. Most of these finds are discovered through metal-detecting, the majority coming from cultivated land where they are at risk from agricultural activity.

At least 615 research projects have used PAS data to date, including 127 PhD students. Research using PAS data has included a project to examine “hoarding practice” in Iron Age and Roman Britain (University of Leicester) and “EngLaId” (Oxford), which analysed change in the English landscape between ca.1500 B.C. and 1086 A.D. Current PhD topics include Rob Webley (York) characterising metalwork of the Anglo-Norman period, and Sam Rowe (Huddersfield) exploring the condition of metal artefacts in the plough-soil. PAS data are also used by Historic Environment Records for development control and other archaeological work.

It is a major advantage for the PAS that its FLOs are based in local museums or other heritage organisations. FLOs regularly visit metal-detecting clubs and local societies, give talks, and organise local outreach events. Anyone might discover archaeology, so it is important for the FLOs to reach out to all. Since 2015, through the Heritage Lottery funded project “PAsT Explorers”, the PAS has also been providing opportunities for people to volunteer with the Scheme and learn more about archaeological finds.

The PAS promotes best archaeological practice. Metal-detecting can be damaging to archaeology, so finders are encouraged to follow the *Code of Practice for Responsible Metal Detecting in England and Wales*. This outlines what finders should do before, while and after metal-detecting. It is a voluntary code, so does not have any weight in law, but some landowners require finders to follow it. Likewise, it is a condition of land under stewardship (where landowners are paid subsidies to manage their land) that finders must follow the Code. The PAS also works closely with the police and other law enforcement authorities to combat illegal metal-detecting.

Although some archaeologists would like all archaeological finds to end up in museums, most museums are selective in what they acquire. It is even the case that many Treasure finds are not acquired. The reasons for this are complex. It is usually the case that unwanted objects are poor examples or common types, but sometimes museums do not acquire because the costs are too high. The PAS, therefore, has an essential role in preserving a record of the past.



Gilded brooch made from a silver penny of Aethelred II (978-1016) from the Isle of Wight (PAS: IOW-A6DB92), reported Treasure via the PAS.



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My Choice

A Pelike with a Dipinto

By Jean-David Cahn



RED-FIGURE PELIKE. H. 14.4 cm. Clay. Attic, 2nd half of 5th cent. B.C.

CHF 28,000

Just recently I acquired a small, Attic, red-figure pelike in an excellent state of preservation. The vase itself is intact, the glaze a deep blue-black, and the painting wonderfully fresh. On each side is a youth. Although separated by the handle, the two young men are shown facing each other and are deep in conversation. The one standing upright, his whole body concealed underneath his cloak, seems to be the one leading the conversation. The other is looking down, lost in thought. His insecurity or indecisiveness is reflected in the instability of his pose: with one foot set back, he is leaning forwards, supporting himself on his Attic staff. What might they be talking about? Unfortunately, we can do no more than guess at the topic of discussion.

Especially worthy of note is the outline drawing scored into the clay, which is still clearly visible on both figures. These lines show the outline of their nude bodies and even the folds of the drapery in places. They would have served as guidance for the artist, who nevertheless took certain liberties when executing the paintings. The identity of the painter eludes us, but he was undoubtedly a very accomplished one.

But the real surprise becomes apparent only when the vase is turned on its head, for on the underside of the base is a caricatured face, first finely engraved and then drawn over! This is most unusual. The fleshy lips, bulbous nose and jutting chin suggest that this is a specific individual – possibly someone from the workshop or perhaps even the artist himself? The vase belongs to the period that saw the first tentative ventures into the art of portraiture. Thus it might serve as a good starting point for a discussion of how caricatures perhaps contributed to the development of this new genre, given that they, too, represent a shift away from canonical idealization to likenesses that emphasized the subjects' individuality – albeit by exaggerating their most distinctive features.

