

Roman highlights from Britain and Hampshire from the Portable Antiquities Scheme

The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS – www.finds.org.uk) was established in 1997, with Hampshire being one of the counties included in this first pilot stage. The PAS was put on a national footing in 2003 and has now recorded more than 1.5 million objects. Its star discoveries are being celebrated in a book series published by Amberley. These include a Hampshire volume by the current county Finds Liaison Officer (FLO), Katie Hinds (*50 Finds from Hampshire*), published in 2017 and celebrated in the President's lecture in 2018. Published this year is a volume on Roman artefacts (*50 Roman Finds from the Portable Antiquities Scheme*) authored by Sally Worrell, HFC Archaeology Section committee member, former Hampshire FLO (1999-2003) and currently PAS later prehistoric and Roman National finds adviser, and John Pearce, King's College London.

SW: My interest in archaeology was sparked as a child by curiosity over the objects found in the Lincolnshire fields opposite the house in which I grew up. This land was farmed by my father and the metal detectorists would show me the objects they'd found, mostly Roman coins, but also prehistoric hand axes and medieval seals, mud-spattered but still intriguing things from a remote past. It turned out, as I showed in the dissertation, I later wrote studying archaeology at Durham, that under those fields lay the remains of a Roman roadside settlement and the objects reflected lives of villagers living on one of Roman Britain's trunk routes. Working for the PAS means that much of my professional life has been spent trying to make sense of antiquities of this kind. Writing the book enabled me to reflect on some of the highlight objects that I've worked on in the last two decades.

JP: My introduction to archaeology came later through taking part in university vacation excavations. After a Masters at Durham (where Sally and I met), I wrote a PhD on Roman burial practice and have worked subsequently in research and teaching posts in Roman archaeology, since 2003 at King's. London offers great opportunities to work with colleagues in the capital's museums. In the 21st century the PAS, based at the British Museum, has been one of the most important new sources of information on Britain's past. It's been a privilege to have collaborated in publishing some of the key new Roman finds.

SW and JP: Given that 600,000+ PAS finds are of Roman date, it's a headache picking just 50 and it would have been easy to fill several books. Other colleagues work on coins, so we have mainly included artefacts of other kinds. Our objects date from the first contacts with Rome in the 1st century BC to *Britannia's* last decades as a province in the early 5th century AD. We've organised them in seven chapters, expressions of Roman power, worship of the gods, magic and lucky charms, dressing the body and styling its appearance, travelling the roads of *Britannia* and household interiors. In each chapter we discuss seven or eight objects to make up our 50, alongside a supporting cast of other artefacts which help us explore our themes. We've tried to achieve a balance between exceptional objects, such as the famous cavalry parade helmet from Crosby Garrett, Cumbria and more typical artefacts, for example the brooches which pinned Romano-British tunics and cloaks. Our finds come from across England and Wales, but objects from Hampshire and neighbouring counties feature strongly as central southern England has been such a rich source of new discoveries.

We've picked two Hampshire here to give a flavour of the book's contents. Our first example is a fragment of a waterclock (*clepsydra*) a time-measuring device in vessel form, being one of only three examples known from antiquity, found at Hambledon (SUSS-BA3CBE). The Hambledon piece (38mm long) derives from the vessel rim. The peg holes punched into it mark the days of the month of August, named after the first emperor, with abbreviated subdivisions of the month, 'N' for Nones and 'D' probably a ligatured letter 'ID' of Ides.



The clock recorded the passing of the hours of the Roman day, which were measured as a proportion of the duration of daylight and so varied in length during the year. Water drained through a hole in the base, progressively dropping below lines incised on the bowl's sides to mark those hours; the distance between those lines varied with the time of year and the day pegs inserted in the holes in the rim helped the reader identify the place on the bowl to make their reading. The Hambledon fragment shows how time in Britain, even in the countryside, was re-set to a Roman standard.

Our second example, a silver ring from Nether Wallop, comes from the end of empire and the other side of the county (WILT-17E7E6). On its flat bezel is engraved a spiral of chevrons forming a tightly coiled serpent. One of 54 rings of the so-called 'Brancaster type', named after the Saxon shore fort on the Norfolk coast where the ring type was first documented, it dates to the final decades of Roman rule or just after. Given its date we are not sure whether to label the serpent as a Greco-Roman sea-dragon (or *ketos* – examples appear on the *Ara Pacis* in Rome, for example, and on the Portland vase in the British Museum) or a monstrous 'wyrn' from Germanic myth, like the dragon responsible for the death of Beowulf at the end of the Anglo-Saxon epic.



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